THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

DECEMBER 1989
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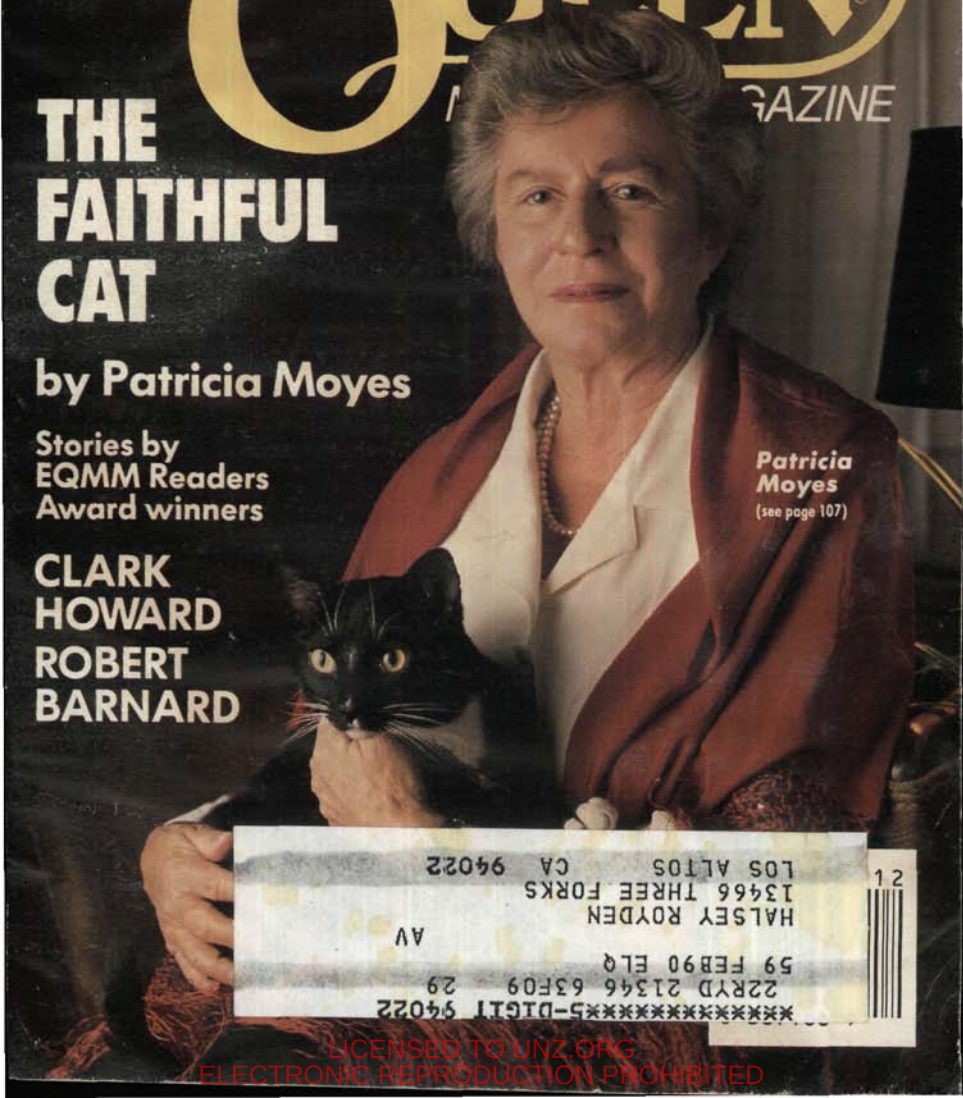

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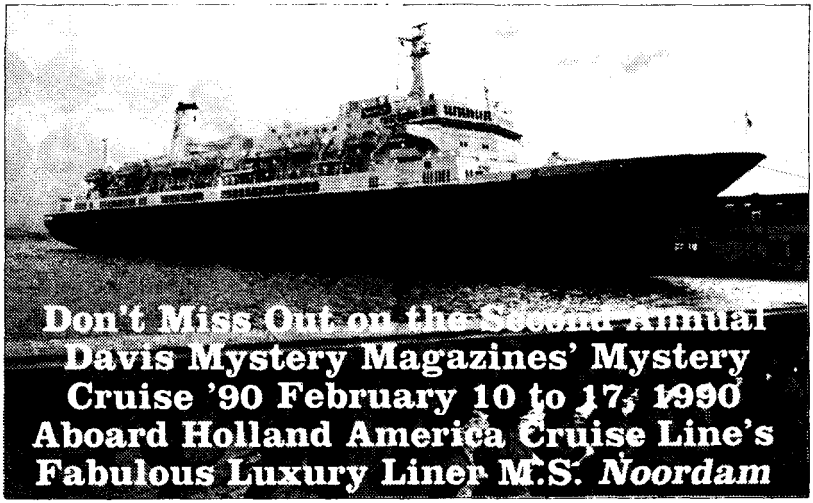

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a *NEW* short story by

CLARK HOWARD

"I never see you in here before," Lan said. "You not live in Elmo?"

"I used to," Maynard said. He added wryly, "I been living up in north Georgia, learning a trade."

"Oh, to learn trade is good. What trade?"

"Uh, broom-making," he half mumbled.

"Broom-making?"

"Uh, yeah. The state's got this broom-making plant up in, uh—up north. I been working there, learning to make brooms and brushes and things."

"Ah," she said. "Is very good, state teach you good trade. State very kind."

"Yeah, very kind."

In Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers, *Edward D. Hoch says: "Clark Howard's concerns are for the outcast, the minority, the prisoner. He has woven these concerns into some of the most exciting short fiction of the 1980s." Hear, hear . . .*

HANGING IT ON A LIMB

by CLARK HOWARD

Maynard was surprised that the old Plymouth ran as well as it did. He'd bought it at a junk car lot that morning for ninety dollars just an hour after he was let out of Jackson Prison. Now, after driving it nearly two hundred miles south down the length of Georgia, it was still cruising along without even an engine knock. Maybe, Maynard thought, after the six years I done, I've got some luck coming.

He decided not to count on it, however. Especially since he might have to shoot a man before the day was out.

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When he crossed the line into Bunker County, Maynard let up on the accelerator a little. With the window rolled down, one prison-white arm resting on the door, he breathed in the moist, heavy air that smelled of dry earth. It should have been the heavy, musky smell of green cotton bolls warming in the afternoon sun, incubating their soft, fluffy embryos, their money crop, but for the third summer out of five Georgia had been shrouded in a drought so bad that farmers couldn't even grow string beans in their gardens, much less cotton in their fields. On both sides of the narrow state highway, Maynard saw land that was burned and stunted. Old Mother Nature, he thought. A wallowing whore one year, giving everything, and a lock-kneed little virgin the next.

Just over the county line, Maynard turned into a secondary road, a blacktop with waves of heat rising from it, and a weathered sign that read: ELMO 3. He drove half that distance, then pulled off on the shoulder in front of a timeworn frame house with a rusted tin roof and a front porch that was sinking at one end. An old black man sat in a wooden rocking chair with a guitar on his lap, quietly strumming without looking down. When Maynard got out and slammed the car door, the old man's fingers stopped. His head didn't turn toward the car. Maynard started along a gravel path leading from the road to the porch. The old man frowned at the sound of Maynard's footsteps.

When Maynard reached the porch, the old man, whose eyes were covered with cataracts as big as bee stings, said, "Jus' give me a minute, now. I'll get it."

As Maynard stood waiting, the front door opened and a black woman of sixty or so, two decades younger than the old man, came out. A lighter-skinned boy of about ten was with her. Neither of them spoke.

Finally the old man said confidently, "You Mason Dixon Maynard's grandson."

"You got me," Maynard acknowledged, shaking his head in wonder. "I swear, I don't know how you do it, Luther. You ain't heard me walk up that path in six years."

"You 'most fooled me," Luther admitted. "Yo' step's heavier. You get fat?"

"Prison shoes," Maynard explained. Luther smiled widely.

"Did you hang it on a limb, boy?" he asked hopefully.

"No, I done my time," Maynard said.

"Yo' granddaddy and me, we hung it on a limb once," Luther said.

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"Daddy," the woman interjected, "Mayne's heard that story ten dozen times since he was a boy."

"It was back in nineteen-and-twenty-nine," Luther continued unabashed. "Yo' granddaddy and me, we was serving on the Duvall County chain gang. He was doin' two years for robbin' the cotton gin, and I was doin' five for batt'ry on a white man. We was bof from Bunker County so we decides to hang our shackles on a limb and come home. Yo' grandmama, she brung a piece of hacksaw blade one Sunday visitin' day and we commence taking turns carrying it back to the barracks of a night. In them days, whites and blacks was separated, even on the chain gang. Every night, one of us would saw a little bit off'n his link, then fill it with mud and let it dry. Took us almos' a month, but one day we finally ready. I ax yo' granddaddy why he want to take a black man with him. He said, 'Luther, I ain't studying yo' color. We be bof from Bunker County, and we's going home together.' That very day, we sneak around back of the rock-quarry outhouse, saw on through bof links, then we hung our shackles on a limb and cut out. Two nights later we was eating blackeyed peas and salt pork right here in this very house." Luther smiled widely. "Them days, they never come after you, see? Long as you didn't get in no mo' trouble, you stayed free. Me and yo' granddaddy, we walk straight and narrow from that day forth."

"You mean you never got caught at nothing after that," Maynard amended wryly.

"Sit down, Mayne," the woman said before Luther could go on. "I'll get you some nice cold tea."

"Thank you, Ella."

As she went inside, Maynard sat on one of the straight chairs near the rocker, and Luther began to strum the guitar again and softly hum a blues song. The boy, who had a cafe au lait complexion, studied Maynard for a moment, then asked, "Are you my daddy?"

Frowning, Maynard replied, "No, boy, I ain't nobody's daddy."

The boy went out into the yard and sat on an old stump, drawing one knee up and swinging the other foot restlessly. While they were alone, Maynard pulled a pint bottle of White Lightning from his hip pocket and quickly took a long swallow. Capping the bottle, he put it in Luther's hand. "Little present," he whispered.

"Fact'ry liquor?" the blind man asked, his fingers feeling the label.

"Yeah. 'Bout half full."

Luther quickly slipped the bottle inside his shirt and resumed strumming. Presently, Ella returned with Maynard's iced tea.

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"How's it been with y'all, Ella?" Maynard asked, taking a drink of tea for a chaser.

"Hard, same as always," Ella replied good-naturedly. "I swear, I don't think I'd know how to act if times *wasn't* hard." Then her voice became sad. "This latest dry spell, it's hurtin' lots of folks real bad. Some peoples done lost places they been on since Mr. Roosevelt was Pres'dent. The bank, it taken your granddaddy's place before he died."

"I heard," Maynard said, looking at the land beyond Luther's old wooden fence, land he had grown up on. "I aim to get it back."

"How?" Ella asked, frowning.

"Any way I can," Maynard said simply. And if he couldn't get it back, he thought, he would fix the banker, the son of a bitch, who took it. Fix him good.

Out in the yard, the young boy had turned around on the stump and was staring hard at Maynard. "Who's the boy?" Maynard asked Ella.

"Winona's," Ella said. "She was my youngest, remember? She went up to Detroit for a while—it was when you was away in the war, I think. One day she come back home carrying him in her belly. Soon's he born, why, some white man come in a big car and take her off. Three years later she killed herself with drugs. The boy, he stayed here; didn't have no place else to go. We does the bes' we can for him, but he growing up moody and mean. Po' little devil ain't even got a proper name—gets called 'Detroit' 'cause that's where he started. Children in school tease him 'cause he such a funny color."

Everybody's got problems, Maynard thought. He finished his iced tea and stood up. "I got to get going, Luther. I come by to tell you I was glad you was there when they buried my granddaddy. The prison people said I could go to the funeral, but I'd have had to wear cuffs and a waist chain. I wasn't going to say goodbye to my granddaddy with chains on. But I was right proud that you was there."

A single tear ran out of one of Luther's pitiful eyes and, still humming, he nodded his head very slowly.

When Maynard left the porch and crossed the yard, the boy, Detroit, turned away and wouldn't look at him. Hardhead, Maynard thought. Probably end up where I just came from.

Uptown in Elmo, Maynard drove once around the square and parked in front of the bank. Walking into its air-conditioned coolness, he stood for a moment as his eyes adjusted from bright sunlight

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to fluorescent. Presently his gaze settled on a man sitting behind a desk at the far rear of the room, surrounded by a walnut fence with a swinging gate. Maynard walked back, went through the gate, and sat down. A sign on the man's desk read: EUGENE J. PHELPS, PRESIDENT.

"Well, now," Maynard said, "you've come a long way since high school, Gene." A hardness edged into his tone. "You the one who took my granddaddy's place?"

"I hope you're not here looking for trouble, Mayne," Phelps said. A man with almost no chin, he was the same age as Maynard, but looked much younger; nicely tanned, his hair styled, nails manicured. His shirt was crisp, no wrinkles, not even any circles of sweat under the arms. Maynard, in his prison dress-outs and convict haircut, a jailhouse tattoo on one arm, nicotine stains on his fingers, could have been ten years older.

"I ain't looking for trouble," Maynard said. "I just want to find out how to get my granddaddy's place back."

"There's no way," the banker told him. "That place was foreclosed on for non-payment of a federal-land bank loan. The property was lawfully auctioned and sold."

"Who bought it?"

"A land broker over in Savannah. But he doesn't have it any more— he sold it to somebody else."

"Who?"

"Some investment company. Matsuo or something, over in Japan."

"Japan? What the hell," Maynard asked incredulously, "does anybody over in Japan want with my granddaddy's place?"

"I wouldn't know," declared Phelps. "Those groups buy a lot of land and more often than not just let it lay. I think it gives them some kind of trade rights if they own property over here."

Maynard leaned forward tensely. "My granddaddy's daddy bought that land a hunnerd goddamn years ago. It ain't right for you to sell it to foreigners!"

"We sell to the highest bidder, Mayne," the banker defended. "The Federal Farm Bank requires that. They even tell us when to foreclose. It's not *me,* Mayne; it's not even this bank—it's the government."

One of Maynard's calves jerked spastically as anger rippled his body. He had come back to Elmo with the intent of either getting back his granddaddy's farm or shooting the banker that had taken it. Now he not only found that the banker was an old classmate of

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his, but apparently wasn't even to blame—not personally, anyway. Who in the hell did that leave to shoot? The government?

He sat back, sighing wearily. "When I come back from Vietnam, my granddaddy was so deep in debt on his farm that he almost lost it then. But I helped him out. I got him twenty thousand dollars to pay off everything and make a down payment on a new John Deere sidehill combine so's he could put in a crop on the slopes along with the flats. I figured all he needed was a fresh start, a new season—"

"Mayne, I know you thought at the time that you were doing right," Gene Phelps said quietly. "But holding up that fancy jewelry store in Atlanta and getting yourself put away for six years—well, maybe your granddaddy would have been better off if you'd just stayed on the farm and helped him."

Maynard shook his head. "I couldn't do that. I was all strung out from those last fourteen months in Vietnam—then the Saigon evacuation, seeing all them people left behind, knowing what was gonna happen to them. And I brought back a drug habit I had to get shed of, too. There wasn't no way I could have turned into a peaceful dirt farmer overnight. I helped my granddaddy the only way I knew how."

"Look, Mayne," Phelps reasoned, "even if you could get the place back now, you wouldn't keep it, you'd just turn around and sell it yourself—"

"I wouldn't sell it," Maynard contradicted, shaking his head. "I'd give it to Luther Bates."

"Old blind Luther? What in the devil would you give land to that old colored man for?"

"He was my granddaddy's friend," Maynard replied simply. "He could get somebody to sharecrop it for him—might make his last days a little better for him."

"Well, it's a moot point, anyhow," the banker said. "It's all over and done with." He drummed his fingers on the desktop. "Anything else you want to know?"

"I reckon not," Maynard said, rising. Phelps rose also and walked to the door with him.

"Now, listen, Maynard, if there's any way I can he'p you out, I want you to let me know. I mean it now, hear? We never were the best of friends, but we did play high-school football together and all. 'Member those days? Boy, we were something, weren't we?"

"Yeah, we were," Maynard said. "It don't seem real, hardly. Seems

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more like a movie I once saw." His expression turned curious. "How's Nadine?"

"Fine, just fine, good as can be," Phelps said a little too quickly, coloring slightly. "We've got two little ones now: a boy and a girl."

"Congratulations," Maynard said, taking care to keep his tone neutral. The way Nadine had once performed in the back seat of his old Chevy, he was surprised they didn't have a dozen. That girl sure had liked it at seventeen. She had a little cloverlike birthmark in the most peculiar place he'd ever seen—

Outside the bank, the two men said goodbye and Maynard walked toward Buster's Cafe on the corner. Over his shoulder, he noticed Gene Phelps crossing to the courthouse in the center of the square. The sheriff's office was in the courthouse. Maynard guessed Gene was on his way to do his civic duty and let the sheriff know an ex-convict was on the loose in Elmo. Two-faced bastard, he thought contemptuously.

Because it was too early for the supper trade, Buster's Cafe was nearly devoid of customers. Two ceiling fans moved the hot, grease-smelling air around while Buster, a big-bellied man whose soiled apron seemed to be holding up his stomach, sat reading a St. James Bible and occasionally reaching out with a swatter to kill an unsuspecting fly.

"Hey, Bus," said Maynard.

"Well, lookee here," Buster responded with a smile. He stuck out a fat hand to shake. "How you doing, boy? You didn't come in here to rob me, I hope—I ain't even made my overhead this week." Suddenly his fleshy face sank into sadness. "I sure am sorry about your granddaddy, Mayne."

"Well, he was an old man," Maynard said resignedly. "I just wish his last year had been better. Wish he could have died on his own place."

"Ain't that the truth. Want something to eat? I made okra soup this morning."

"Just some coffee, Bus." Maynard bobbed his chin at the Bible. "You get religion?"

"Not exactly," Buster replied, drawing a cup of coffee. "I've decided to become a television evangelist—you know, like Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker and them. I'm tired of being a fry cook, even if it is in my own cafe. Way I look at it, I can prob'ly put on as good a show as them old boys does, and the way they've all messed up lately, why, hell, there must be all kinds of good people just waitin'

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for somebody new to contribute to. But I don't want to be just another pretty face, know what I mean? I want to be the real thing. That's why I'm studying the good book. I might take singing lessons, too." He put the cup of coffee in front of Maynard.

As Buster had been talking, Maynard noticed a Vietnamese woman come from the kitchen carrying a tray of clean glasses which she proceeded to line up on a shelf behind the counter. Maynard raised his eyebrows inquisitively.

" 'Member Dewey Kidder?" Buster asked, lowering his voice to a confidential tone. "He was a year ahead of us in high school. 'Member he used to sleep in class a lot and ever'body said he'd never amount to nothing? Well, they was right—he's an accountant over in Valdosta. 'Fore he turned bad, though, he married this here little Vietnamese gal and brought her back from 'Nam. Settled down in a real good job pumping gas at Junior Munsell's Texaco station. Then along come this freckle-faced, redheaded little gal from Valdosta who decided that old Dewey was just the man of her dreams. Make a long story short, he left his Vietnamese wife, moved to Valdosta with Freckles, and her daddy sent the worthless hound to college so he could join the old man's accounting firm."

"So how'd you end up with the slant?" Maynard asked.

A frown clouded Buster's face. "Her name's Lan, Maynard. And I ain't 'ended up' with her, not like you think. I felt sorry for her is all. Left all alone in a strange country, with strange people. So I give her a job an' I let her fix up a room out back to live in. Oh, I know what people in town think—every peckerwood I know gives me the old sly wink and stupid grin. But I don't care. I helped her when nobody else would." Buster looked away, his frown becoming a scowl. "I'd be obliged if you wouldn't call her a 'slant.' "

"Sure. I'm sorry, Bus. I didn't mean nothing by it. Just habit."

Buster shrugged and was silent for a moment, then he asked, "Want to meet her?"

It caught Maynard by surprise. "Uh—Yeah. Okay."

"Lan, come here a minute," Buster called.

She left the glasses and hurried over, a thin wafer of a woman with high, wide cheekbones and eyes as dark as ripe plums. She had an overbite that made her upper lip wider than the lower, narrow, square shoulders, almost no breasts that Maynard could see.

"Lan, this here's Mayne, my buddy," Buster introduced.

Maynard greeted her in Vietnamese, which seemed almost to em-

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barrass her. "I am please you to meet," she replied in practiced but imperfect English.

A couple of truck drivers came in and Buster went to wait on them. Lan started to go away, but Maynard quickly made conversation. "Do you like it here in Elmo?"

"Sometime," she said, shrugging self-consciously. "Some people very nice. Some people not so nice."

"Buster's one of the nice ones, huh?"

"Oh, yes. Buster, he very best. Buster good man like I think American husband be. But I wrong."

"Yeah, well," Maynard said quietly, "being wrong's about the easiest thing anybody can do." Lan smiled briefly and again started to go, but Maynard took a quick gulp of coffee and pushed the cup toward her, saying, "Could I get this warmed up, please?"

When Lan brought the freshly filled cup back, it was she who continued the conversation. "I never see you in here before. You not live in Elmo?"

"I used to," Maynard said. He added wryly, "I been living up in north Georgia, learning a trade."

"Oh, to learn trade is good. What trade?"

"Uh, broom-making," he half mumbled.

"Broom-making?"

"Uh, yeah. The state's got this broom-making plant up in, uh—up north. I been working there, learning to make brooms and brushes and things."

"Ah," she said. "Is very good, state teach you good trade. State very kind."

"Yeah, very kind."

When Buster walked back over, Lan excused herself and returned to her work. "Nice gal, ain't she?" Buster said.

"Real nice," Maynard replied.

"Listen, 'fore I forget, I got your granddaddy's trunk back in my storeroom. He had it moved over here from the boarding house when he went in the hospital. I guess he knew he wouldn't be coming out." Buster opened the cash-register drawer and fished a key from one of the wells. "Come on, I'll show you where it is."

In a room lined with shelves of big lard cans, sacks of beans, crates of onions, and jars of mustard, pickles, and other condiments, there stood in one corner an old Civil War trunk of faded oak with tarnished metal trim, held shut by a thick brass hasp through which an old Master lock had been attached. Maynard knelt next to the

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trunk and rubbed his fingertips gently over the aged surface. Buster handed him the key, saying, "I'll leave you alone to look at his things."

Buster left and Maynard unlocked the Master and raised the trunk lid. There was a tray section on top, divided into little compartments, its surface covered with peeling decorative paper. His eyes scanning the contents, Maynard's fingers moved from one article to the next: an old pair of bifocals in a metal snap case, an expired fishing license, a RE-ELECT ROOSEVELT pin, a rolled-up belt with an initialed buckle, a yellowed newspaper clipping that read: MAYNARD GETS 2 YEARS, and a variety of other things—buttons, old pipes, a jackknife, a tobacco can of fish hooks, some snapshots that were turning brown. Maynard looked at the photographs: one of his daddy, shot and killed in a card game when Maynard was four; his mother, who ran off with a married neighbor two years later; his grandmother, who he had never known, but about whom his granddaddy had told many warm, often humorous stories; even a few photos of himself and his granddaddy taken during the years his granddaddy had raised him.

Beneath the tray there was mostly old clothes and a few things that wouldn't fit in the tray: two rifles, broken down, their stocks and barrels carefully wrapped; a ten-inch hunting knife in a sheath; a Colt's revolver with a six-inch barrel and bone grips; a few boxes of cartridges. Taking the revolver from its nest in the layered clothing, Maynard hefted it for balance. The old six-shooter would have come in handy if he had found anyone to blame for taking his granddaddy's land and making the old man live his last year in a boarding house. But there was no one to blame—you couldn't shoot the government. Putting the pistol back, Maynard replaced the tray and locked the trunk.

Back out in the cafe, he asked Buster, "Okay if I leave the trunk here until I decide what to do?"

"Hell, yes." Buster scratched his head. "Funny, ain't it, how a man's life can last as long as your granddaddy's did and still come down to one trunk full at the end? I guess that was all the bank left him. Old Gene Phelps don't miss much when he's selling to hisself."

Something pinched Maynard's brain. "What do you mean?"

"He's got hisself a land-brokering business over in Savannah. It's not in his name, of course, but ever'body knows it's his. Anytime he forecloses on a farm, he turns around and buys it hisself through his brokering company by bidding a few hundred dollars more than anybody else. Then he resells the land at a big profit, usually to

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some Japanese buyer. Won't be many years the U.S. is gonna *belong* to Japan."

"Are you sure?" Maynard asked. "About the Savannah business?"

"Positive. His cousin runs the place, but old Gene, he's got ninety percent of the stock. 'Course, it's in Nadine's name. Jerry Hickman's wife works in the Savannah business-license department—she looked it up one time."

Another customer came in and Buster left Maynard alone at the counter. Maynard stared for a long moment at the black circle of coffee in his cup, then rose and returned to the back room and unlocked the trunk again.

He got out the pistol and loaded it.

It was just past dusk when Maynard slipped out of the woods behind Gene Phelps' house and moved quietly up to the open kitchen windows. Two black women were preparing supper, one slicing potatoes, one breading porkchops. A little girl was playing on the floor. She looked like Nadine except that she had no chin, like Gene.

Maynard looked around. The house was in the middle of several acres, surrounded by trees, with no neighbor in sight. Moving on, he went around the side of the house and checked the open windows there until he found Gene.

He was with Nadine. They were in a large bedroom, Gene lying on a king-size bed with his shoes off, reading a newspaper. Nadine, in her slip, was sitting at a vanity applying makeup. Drawing the pistol from his waistband, Maynard moved a few feet away, carefully cocked the hammer, then stepped back to the window. There he hesitated—he didn't want to shoot Gene with Nadine in the room. He decided to wait a few minutes and see if they separated.

As Maynard stood there, the shadows around him deepening, he began to listen to the conversation in the bedroom.

"Just how long do you think I'm going to put up with this?" Nadine asked in a voice that sounded flinty. It wasn't the same throaty backseat voice Maynard remembered.

"Put up with what?" Gene asked disinterestedly.

"You know damn well what!" she snapped, turning on the vanity seat. She had gained weight, Maynard noticed. The tight little cheerleader body had become fleshy.

"Nadine, I've told you a hundred times," Gene said irritably, lowering the newspaper, "it's all over between Nancy Sue and me. I've *fired* the girl. What else do you want me to do—have her murdered?"

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"I'm not talking about Nancy Sue. I'm talking about that slut you've got working for you in the Savannah office. What's her name—Dawny or Tawny?"

"Fawny."

"Fawny. Isn't that cute? I just love all these pretty little names young girls have these days. Fawny and Heather and Mindy and Tish. Do you realize how stupid those names are going to be when those girls get old? I mean *really* old: seventy, eighty. Can you picture a little old lady in some nursing home named Mindy? Or Fawny?" She gave her husband a withering look. " 'Course we both know it's not their names that interest you, don't we, sugar?"

"Now listen here, Nadine—"

"No, you listen to me, Gene Phelps! I have had it with your playing around! You are not going to make me the laughingstock of this county!"

Just then the bedroom door opened and a little boy came in. "Mommy, why are you yelling at Daddy?" he asked. Maynard studied the boy. He looked exactly like Gene had looked in the second grade.

"Mommy and Daddy were just playing a game, sweetheart. You run along now and have Nettie get you ready for supper."

After the boy left, Gene sat up on the side of the bed, letting the newspaper drop to the floor. "It appears to me, Nadine, that it's a little late to begin worrying about your reputation in the county. If I'd known all the things I later found out, we wouldn't be married in the first place, much less have kids."

"What do you mean by that?" she demanded, one foot beginning to tap nervously.

"I mean we already had the boy and you were pregnant with the girl when Bill Pete Wilkins got drunk one night over at the V.F.W., forgot who he was drinking with, and told me all about the good times you had while I was away at college."

"You going to believe a lying drunk like Bill Pete Wilkins?" Nadine scoffed.

"He knows about your birthmark, honey," Gene said drily. "And he's not the only one who knows." Picking up his shoes, he walked to the bedroom door. "Oh, before I forget—I have to spend the weekend in Savannah. Business." He walked out of the room.

Maynard quickly moved from window to window on that side of the house to see where Gene was going, but he couldn't find him in any of the rooms. Keeping to the shadows, holding the cocked pistol away from his body, he tried the opposite side of the house. Only

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the children's rooms were over there. Trotting to the kitchen again, he saw that Gene had not gone there. Could there be, he wondered, an interior room that had no windows—a study, maybe, or an office? Puzzled, sweating, the gun in his hand seeming to become heavier, Maynard made a complete circuit of the house again. When he got back to the bedroom window, he heard Nadine talking again and thought Gene was back. But when he looked in, he saw that she was on the phone. He started to go on past, but her words stopped him.

"I've decided to file for divorce, Clarence. Gene and I have reached the point of total incompatibility. Naturally I want your law firm to handle it for me. Virginia and I have been such good friends for so long, I wouldn't think of using anyone but her charming husband. Besides, I've already told you about the stock I hold in the land-brokering firm. Two things I intend to get out of this divorce are custody of the children and that stock. I know you told me there might be some conflict-of-interest charges against Gene once the stock comes to light, but I can't help that. It's his worry. Oh, Clarence, shame on me, I haven't even asked if Virginia is feeling any better. How is she, dear?"

As Maynard waited while Nadine listened on the telephone, he saw a light come on in a room near the other end of the house. He started to move toward it but Nadine began speaking again and her words held him there.

"I'm so sorry to hear that, Clarence. Maybe it's early menopause or something. Of course, it's doubly distressing to me because I know what a vigorous man you are. What? Why, certainly I remember, Clarence, don't be silly." After another pause, she said, "A drink and dinner? Just to discuss my case, you mean? How thoughtful of you not to make me come to your office. Gene will be in Savannah all weekend—"

Maynard moved in a crouch down to the other lighted windows. Looking in, he saw that it was a small, comfortably furnished study and that Gene had settled into a big leather recliner with a drink in one hand and a television remote-control in the other.

Changing the gun to his left hand, Maynard wiped his right on the leg of his trousers. His palm and trigger finger dry, he took half a step back and balanced the heel of his hand and the gun handle on the window sill. Payback time, Mr. Banker, he thought, wetting his lips, swallowing.

He stood there for a full minute without firing.

Nadine's words ricocheted in slow motion off the inside of his skull.

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Divorce—conflict of interest—custody of the children. It would be a shame, Maynard thought, to deprive Gene Phelps of all the misery Nadine was planning for him.

He lowered the gun. Staring through the window, he thought: You're gonna pay in a lot of ways for what you done. A lot of ways worse than a bullet.

Moving away from the house into the darkness, Maynard uncocked the gun.

Buster's Cafe was closed by the time Maynard got back to town. He parked behind it and knocked on the back door until Lan finally came to see who it was.

"I'd like to get that trunk Buster let me leave here," he said.

She let him in and he started dragging the trunk out of the storeroom. Halfway through the kitchen, he paused and looked thoughtfully at her.

"Listen, Lan, I'm on my way down to a little town in the Florida panhandle that has a brush-manufacturing plant that hires—well, that hires people like me."

"Like you?" she asked, puzzled. "How like you?"

"People who know how to make brooms and stuff," he said, unable to muster the courage at that moment to tell her the ex-convict part of it. Later, perhaps, if anything developed between them. "Anyway, what I was thinking, if you'd like to get out of Elmo and make a new start, you could come along with me."

"You want me be your woman?" she asked candidly.

"Well, I don't know," Maynard hedged. "Maybe. I mean, if you wanted to. You wouldn't have to. But if we was to get to liking one another—"

"Okay," she agreed. "Sound good to me. I go call Buster."

"Yeah, you do that. Go call Buster." He couldn't help being a little surprised at how quickly the arrangement had been consummated.

He finished dragging the old trunk out and got it into the car. Presently Lan came out carrying a cheap little suitcase. "Buster say if you not treat me good, he come to Florida and kick you in ass."

"He prob'ly would, too," Maynard laughed.

They drove a little way out of town and then Maynard suddenly pulled over and stared at the lights of a house back off the road. Presently he turned off the engine.

"I just want to stop here a minute," he told her.

Gravel crunched under his shoes as he left the car and hurried

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toward the lights. Waiting alone in the darkness, Lan shivered slightly. There was a round clock on the dashboard, but she wasn't certain it was working. He said he was just going to stop for a minute. The clock wasn't working, she was sure of it. She decided to count to sixty—that would be a minute. She began.

When she got to sixty, he still was not back. Maybe she had counted too fast. She counted again. When she finished this time, she began to feel afraid. She got quietly out of the car and looked hard toward the lights of the house. She had almost made up her mind to walk toward the lights when she heard the crunch of gravel again.

Maynard emerged from the shadows. There was a young boy with him, carrying a bundle of clothes.

"This here's Detroit," Maynard said. "He's going with us."

They all got into the car and drove away.

After they had gone a couple of miles, Detroit asked, "Is this like hanging it on a limb? Getting away from someplace?"

"That's exactly what it is," Maynard replied quietly. "And maybe it's the last time any of us will ever have to do it."

When they got to the highway, Maynard turned south toward Florida.

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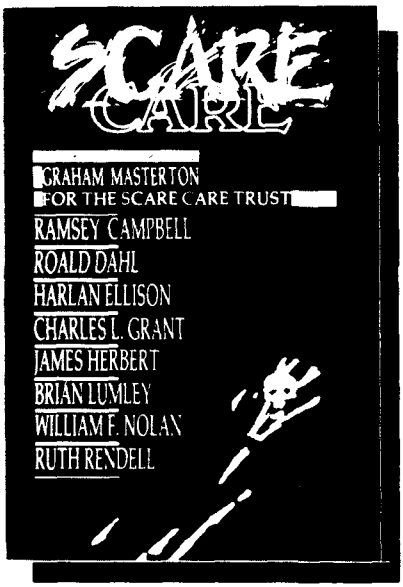

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a ***NEW*** short story by

DONALD OLSON

Sister Veronica admitted being able to identify the thief who took the Poussin painting from the church, but refused to reveal his name.

"How very extraordinary. How does she attempt to justify such a refusal?" Treviss asked.

"Her exact words were: 'If bearing witness to what is false might do more harm than bearing witness to what is wrong, it is better to remain silent.' You like puzzles," Sister Mary Benedict challenged. "Solve that one . . . "

BEARING WITNESS

by DONALD OLSON

With a flourish, O'Dell opened the box and uttered a jeering laugh as his companion recoiled from the sickly stench of decay that rose into the damp autumn air.

"What's that supposed to do, spook her to death?"

"She *saw* me, man. If she opens her mouth, I'm finished."

"You can't be sure she recognized you."

"Like hell she didn't." Just then a car slowed to turn through the gates. O'Dell quickly recovered the box, tucked it under his arm, and led the way out of the cemetery.

To Treviss the oak-paneled office in which they waited looked the same as it had the last time he'd entered it more years ago than he cared to remember. Even the chair he occupied might have been the same one he'd sat in with such dreadful expectancy when he'd been sent to the principal's office for disciplining, yet he knew the illusion that nothing had changed extended no farther than the office door.

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"You don't remember the way it used to be, do you, Peters?"

Treviss's young friend and assistant looked up from his magazine. "I'm not a Catholic. The only time I was ever here was when we played St. Mike's. You think it's true a lot of Protestant parents used to send their kids here because the nuns were tougher on hard cases?"

Before Treviss could reply, the door opened and Sister Mary Benedict, principal of St. Michael's Parochial School, rushed in, all smiles and a flurry of apologies. "I'm sorry, gentlemen. We've had a minor crisis in the cafeteria."

Treviss introduced Peters, amused by the look on the young man's face. What had he expected, a wimple-framed face and a trailing black habit? Did the stylish suit shock him, or was it the earrings?

"Don't apologize, Sister. I've been recalling boyhood memories."

"It's not quite the same now, is it? Only myself and three other nuns rattling around in the convent next door. There were so many when I first arrived, *and* a mother superior. As for the school, there wasn't a single lay teacher then." She stopped herself. "I'm sorry. You're not here to hear me reminisce."

"Monsignor told you I'm not a detective, I assume."

"A solver of puzzles, I believe he called you. That's what I want—someone not connected with the police."

"And Sister Veronica will talk to me?"

"That was my condition," she replied, "for withholding her information from the police. Against my better judgment."

Monsignor Doyle had asked Treviss, as a friend, to look into the disappearance of a religious painting by Poussin which had been on display—imprudently, it now transpired—in the church sanctuary prior to its being included in an auction to benefit the current church-renovation fund. The police, at the Monsignor's request, had agreed to temporarily withhold public disclosure of the theft.

"This isn't a rich parish, as you know," said Sister Mary Benedict. "Raising nearly a million dollars hasn't been easy. We were counting on the sale of the painting to fill the gap."

"I understand that technically the painting is still the property of the donor, Lena Taylor-Maxfield."

"Such a dear old lady, and not at all well. You can imagine her distress. The picture is insured, of course, and if it comes to that she intends to donate the insurance money to St. Michael's. I hope it doesn't come to that. I hope the painting can be reclaimed."

Treviss rose and moved to the window from where he could see,

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across the street from the adjoining convent, the greystone Gothic church behind a framework of scaffolding. "I understand there was no evidence of a break-in."

Sister nodded. "If one has legitimate reason to enter the church at off hours, a key must be obtained at the rectory. I also have a key. The one Sister Veronica used to enter the church the evening of the theft."

"For what purpose?"

"Her private devotions."

Peters suggested that the thief could easily have concealed himself in the church after the last daily Mass at five o'clock. Sister Mary Benedict agreed. "After the painting was discovered missing, I asked Sister Veronica if she'd seen anyone in the church or lurking about. You can imagine my astonishment when she confessed not only to seeing someone in the church but to seeing him actually remove the painting. She admits being able to identify the thief but refuses to reveal his name."

"How very extraordinary," declared Treviss. "How does she attempt to justify such a refusal?"

"Her exact words were: 'If bearing witness to what is false might do more harm than bearing witness to what is wrong, it is better to remain silent.' You like puzzles—solve that one."

Treviss smiled. "Your Sister Veronica has a subtle wit."

"Indeed she has not. She has a most artless nature—she is completely honest, forthright, and exceedingly devout."

"Might she have been threatened?" Peters suggested. "Be too frightened to speak?"

Sister Mary Benedict laughed. "If anything frightens her, it's the moral dilemma she's created for herself."

Treviss frowned. "Obviously she's protecting someone. But who, and why? One shrinks from the notion of a sticky-fingered priest."

"There's only Monsignor Doyle and Father Brice. Both are above reproach."

"I wasn't quite serious," Treviss smiled. "And the painting *is* technically still the property of the donor?"

"A greedy relative, you're thinking, who resents losing a valuable inheritance to the church. I'm afraid not. The painting has already been willed to St. Michael's. Mrs. Taylor-Maxfield decided it would do more good being sold now when the proceeds could help the building fund. Besides, she has only one son, Randolph, and no other

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relatives. Randolph is a lovely boy. Well, I say boy, but that's how I remember him. Now he's a very successful architect in New York."

Treviss turned to Peters. "If Sister can arrange it, I'd like you to call on Mrs. Taylor-Maxfield."

"For what purpose?"

"Because you've a way with old ladies. She may have dismissed a servant who bears a grudge. Perhaps a stranger, a dealer possibly, has shown an interest in the painting recently."

Peters clearly favored a more direct approach to the problem. "Sister, don't you have rules of conduct? If Sister Veronica knows who took the painting, can't you just—"

"Chain her to the rack?" The principal smiled engagingly. "Bring back the Inquisition, you mean?"

Peters flushed. "Well, nothing like that, of course, but—"

"I'm afraid the situation is a bit complex. You see, I don't want to lose Sister Veronica and there appears a strong possibility that I may. The Church has lost too many nuns and priests in recent years. Sister Veronica is at present undergoing a crisis of faith—or more precisely, a crisis of vocation. With more experience I feel she will excel as a teacher, but she finds it difficult dealing with the more rebellious students. She feels ineffectual and her professional uncertainties have led to doubts about her vocation as a nun. I don't think I'm betraying a confidence when I tell you this is the reason she was in the church that evening. She's been making a novena to St. Therese."

The principal saw the question on Peters' face and explained: "A nine days' devotion for a particular cause. Perhaps she is *too* devout—naive, I should say—in the sense of expecting a sign: a sign that she is on the right path here. I wish I could believe such things still happen. Perhaps they do, but I wish she had more faith in herself, or would be more amenable to earthly guidance. Oh, dear, I'm afraid that makes me sound like a frightfully worldly person, but then I'm not as young and susceptible as Sister Veronica. Once, perhaps—" She turned her gaze to the window, beyond which the sun lay warmly on the ivy-covered wall of the neighboring convent. Then, with an air of renewed briskness, she glanced at the clock on the wall. A bell rang in the corridor outside. "I'll phone Mrs. Taylor-Maxfield and let you know after lunch when you can see her, Mr. Peters."

Treviss was preparing to leave for his meeting with Sister Ve-

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ronica when Peters arrived back at the cottage. His talk with Lena Taylor-Maxfield, he reported, had produced no useful information.

"The theft of the painting has shattered the old lady. Except for being exhibited in New York several years ago, it's hung in her bedroom ever since she and her husband bought it in Europe sixty years ago. There haven't been any servants in years, only an aged housekeeper. The old lady's son told me he's trying to persuade his mother to sell the place and move into a flat."

"You met her son? I thought he lived in New York."

"He does. Partner in a very prestigious firm of industrial architects, Taylor-Maxfield & Wilkins. Nice chap, though, nothing stuffy about him. Obviously he thinks the world of his mother. She called him when she heard the painting had been swiped and he rushed up here to give her moral support." Peters fixed himself a drink and added, "I still say you should put some pressure on Sister Veronica. As I see it, being a nun doesn't exempt her from doing her civic duty."

Treviss declined to argue the point. "I want you to do one more thing. Run down to police headquarters and ask our good friend Lieutenant Mullard for a copy of the prints they lifted from the knife."

"That's another thing," said Peters. "That utility knife found in the sanctuary was obviously used to cut the painting from the frame. Why did the thief leave it behind? Or if he forgot it, why didn't he go back for it?"

"The most likely reason is that he felt he had nothing to fear from having his prints found on the knife."

"But wouldn't only the two priests be above suspicion? Who else would the nun be so determined to protect?"

"That, my dear Peters, is what I hope to find out."

As soon as the younger man had left, Treviss reached for the phone directory and proceeded to make a number of local calls.

He was told that Sister Veronica was waiting for him in the garden at the rear of the convent. As Treviss opened the wicket gate into the flower-bordered area of lawn secluded behind shoulder-high brick walls, he couldn't help recalling that it had been in a garden, among summer flowers, that he had received poor Lizzie Frayle, the subject of one of his most intriguing cases, and failed to win from her more than a veiled admission that she had murdered her employer. This, however, was an autumn garden, the grass strewn with

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dead maple leaves, only the hardier of the roses still adding touches of brilliant color under a westering sun which had already lost its warmth.

In one corner of the garden a statue of the Virgin looked down with pensive, painted eyes from a raised niche draped in ivy, and from a wooden bench in the opposite corner Sister Veronica regarded Treviss's approach with an equally melancholy expression until, putting aside the book she'd been reading, she rose to greet him with a smile that betrayed no hint of apprehension. As the roses glowed more brightly amid the faded greenery of the garden, so did the drab color of her simple habit enhance the freshness of her pink-and-ivory complexion.

"What a pretty place," observed Treviss. "When I was a student at St. Michael's, we used to sneak over the wall for pears. The tree stood right over there as I remember." Now the spot was occupied by a young rose of Sharon, its mauve and lilac blossoms already withering on the grass.

"The boys still climb the wall," she replied, "but their acts of mischief are not so innocently inspired."

Treviss picked up the book in order to sit down beside her and glanced at the title. It was *Story of a Soul,* the autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux.

" 'Pray to me and I shall send you a shower of roses.' Wasn't she the one who promised that?" Treviss inquired. "Or was that the other St. Teresa?"

He was rewarded with a smile of surprised approval. "No, you're right. The one called the Little Flower." Her smile faded. "Sister asked me to see you, Mr. Treviss, but I'm not sure what her object could have been."

"Well, I'm sure you must appreciate the distress your silence in this sorry matter of the stolen painting has caused her. You've put her in a very awkward position vis-a-vis Monsignor and the police."

"Yes, I appreciate that. I'm sorry she asked me about that evening. I felt obliged to tell her the truth. I couldn't have lied."

"And I'm sure you must have what seems to you a valid reason for telling her no more than you did. But can you tell me, did the person who removed the painting see you?"

"Yes."

"Threaten you?"

"No."

"Yet the thief knows you can identify him."

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"Yes."

"What do you fear might happen if you expose him?"

"An innocent person will suffer," she replied with a troubled look.

"And you wish to prevent that, even if it means depriving the church of a considerable sum of much-needed money?"

"Oh, no," she replied with a sudden flash of spirit. "That won't happen. I trust—I trust it will all be made right. Without causing pain to anyone or embarrassment to the church."

Treviss smiled faintly, as if with secret satisfaction that Sister Veronica had unwittingly provided him with another clue to the mystery. "Sister Mary Benedict hoped I might persuade you to speak out. You won't, of course. Because you made a promise not to betray the thief. Isn't that true?"

A blush accompanied by an anxious frown might or might not have been an answer. She said nothing.

Treviss glanced up to where a flock of sparrows, hardly more than black dots against the fading sky, circled high above the convent chimney, below which the setting sun created an illusion of flames burning behind the long row of windows.

"Allow me to tell you, Sister, what I think happened. You needn't tell me if I'm right, but I hope you'll let me know if I'm totally wrong.

"I think you went to the church that evening to make your devotions. You were on your knees in the side chapel when you heard a noise, perhaps from the vestry. A door opened and someone entered. Perhaps at first you thought it was a priest. Then you saw this man raise a knife, unaware of your presence, and proceed to cut the painting from its frame. You cried out.

"He dropped the knife. But he didn't flee with the painting—he confronted you. You recognized him, or he identified himself. As you say he didn't threaten you, then he must have told you something that made you agree not to give him away. I think I can guess what that something was.

"What was it you said to Sister Mary Benedict—that to bear witness to what is false might be worse than bearing witness to what is wrong? By 'what is wrong' you obviously were alluding to the theft. By 'what is false' I assume you were referring to the painting, the Poussin Madonna. I think you know the picture stolen from the church was a forgery. A copy."

Sister Veronica half rose, then subsided weakly onto the bench, her face a pallid mask beneath the shadow of the wall.

"Tell me, Sister," Treviss asked, "am I wrong?"

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Again, she said nothing.

"Let's call it a semi-educated guess, Peters. I paid a call on the Taylor-Maxfields after leaving the convent. On Randolph Taylor-Maxfield, that is. I had a hunch, you see, and before talking to Sister Veronica I'd called the hotels and found out that, unknown to his mother, Randolph had flown up here the very day the picture was stolen. When I told him I was quite sure the prints on the knife could be identified as his, he admitted everything. It seems that his mother had written to tell him she'd donated the painting to the church auction. He knew that if a museum bought it and subjected it to tests, it would be revealed as a forgery—the church would be embarrassed and his mother humiliated."

"He'd known the picture was a fake?"

"Oh, yes—for years. You see, he'd needed a lot of money when he was setting up his firm, so he took the Madonna to New York, telling his mother it was to be exhibited in a friend's gallery. Instead, he had a copy made and sold the original to a private European collector. At the time he foresaw no future difficulty, expecting eventually to inherit the picture along with the rest of his mother's estate."

"It must have shaken him to learn she'd willed it to the church," said Peters.

"Not unduly. What might happen after his mother's death didn't worry him. It was only when she called and told him she had donated it to the church auction that he panicked."

"So he stole the painting. And had no qualms, presumably, about defrauding the insurance company?"

"He admits he intended to let that happen—until Sister Veronica, after listening to the whole story, agreed to remain silent only if he agreed to make up the loss to the church out of his own funds."

With some chagrin, Peters admitted he had misjudged the young nun. "Her primary motive, then, was to protect Lena Taylor-Maxfield."

Treviss nodded. "The old lady is dying, Peters. A scandal, should the forgery have been detected, could only have caused her immense pain."

"And so now you and Monsignor Doyle have persuaded the police to drop the investigation."

"Under the circumstances, Lieutenant Mullard agreed it would be the best move . . ."

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The following afternoon Treviss walked into the principal's office, saw that he was interrupting, and was in the act of withdrawing when Sister Mary Benedict beckoned him in. "Young Mr. O'Dell was just leaving."

The youth cast a hangdog look at Treviss and backed toward the door as if from the wrath of an avenging angel.

"O'Dell—remember that you have Sister Veronica to thank for my leniency. If she hadn't gone to bat for you, this would be your last day at St. Michael's. She has more faith in you than I have. Take my advice—don't disappoint her."

"No, Sister, I won't, I promise. Thank you, Sister." And with a sheepish nod of his head, he escaped.

Treviss shut the door behind him and turned with a smile to Sister Mary Benedict.

"Properly cowed, I should say."

"I wouldn't bet on it. But I don't think he'll be spraying any more obscenities on the convent wall. Little bully. I think he was surprised that Sister Veronica reported him—and even more surprised that she talked me out of expelling him. Especially after he had the gall to do what he did in hope of scaring her into silence."

"What *about* Sister Veronica? Have you talked her into staying?"

"She's staying, yes, but it wasn't *I* who persuaded her." She turned aside to gaze down into the convent garden. "Strange, isn't it, how sometimes we reach a point where almost nothing makes sense any more, and then something happens, and we wonder? We wonder—"

"You're talking about Sister Veronica?"

Without looking around, as if reluctant to betray the emotion on her face, she said, "I told you Sister Veronica was making a novena to St. Therese, praying for guidance in making her decision. Hoping for a sign, poor child.

"That wretched lad who just left the office with his tail between his legs knew nothing of that. All he meant to do was intimidate his teacher into silence with a tasteless joke. Sister Veronica found a box on her desk when she came into her classroom this morning. It contained a bunch of rotting flowers and around them a ribbon with the words *Rest in Peace* on it. The incorrigible O'Dell had taken them off a grave in Holy Sepulchre Cemetery."

"Don't tell me," said Treviss. "The flowers were roses."

Peters was quick to scoff. " 'Pray to me and I shall send you a

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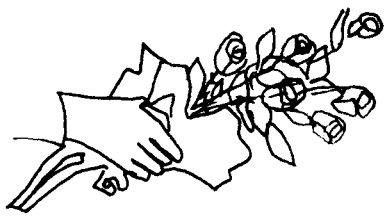
shower of roses.' Come on, sir, you surely don't believe in that sort of thing, do you? Coincidence, that's all it was."

"Don't sneer, Peters. Literature abhors coincidence, and rightly perhaps. But life? Unless you believe your parents were ordained to meet, but for coincidence you wouldn't be here. No, my young friend, I have a great respect for coincidence, as I have for all of life's mysteries—explain it as you will, a senseless collision of human events or a game invented by the gods for their own amusement."

With a grin, Peters moved to the sideboard. "I think you need a drink, sir."



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Miriam couldn't help thinking of Thomas Ngala and of his little black knife. Was he a Mau Mau, a member of the political cult made up of Kikuyu tribesmen? Was he the man with the little black knife . . . ?

THE LITTLE BLACK KNIFE

by SCOTT MACKAY

Miriam Lancaster recognized the black man sitting over by the piano instantly. Crepe-paper ribbons arced from corner to corner, a few nurses stood by in case the excitement became too great for the old people, and Mrs. Hutchison, the activities director, fretted over the buffet table while giving directions to one of the Oceanview Towers kitchen staff. The newcomers' party had been marred by the late arrival of the caterers.

Miriam took another sip of her coffee, looked once more at the man, put her plastic-foam cup down, and approached him, trying to get unobtrusively nearer. Could it really be, she wondered? From so long ago? She stopped by the Chinese print of the butterfly hanging on the wall above the fireplace. The pleasant cafuffle of the Strawberry Social Welcoming Party for New Residents disappeared and she sat in a circle with seven other teenage girls, shaded by euphorbia trees, the wind rippling the wheat fields nearby. She studied his face more closely.

The man, now noticing her, stared back annoyed, gave her a look, then turned away. He didn't recognize her. How was he to recognize her, she thought? She had been eighteen at the time. Now she was fifty-one, in a white labcoat, the nurse practitioner for Oceanview Towers, a little chubby and hair going grey. Those were his eyes, she thought—bloodshot, the irises a concentrated black, the eyelashes short and wiry, more like steel than hair. He gave her another look, a peevish old man, and turned in his chair, showing his back, then continued to eat his strawberry shortcake.

Why did they have to overheat seniors' buildings, she wondered? She never perspired, yet now her forehead was moist. She turned

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away. She worked her way through the wheelchairs, past the old people with their canes and glasses, rich old people who had done well enough to live in the luxurious Oceanview Towers. She continued toward the buffet table and took Elaine Hutchison by the elbow.

"There are more than usual this time, aren't there?" she said.

Elaine was thirty-five, had brown hair, and wore a brown outfit with a nametag pinned to her lapel. Her movements were quick, precise, and efficient—fueled by her daily intake of eight cups of coffee.

"Five or six more," she said.

"Do you find it hot in here?"

"No, not really."

Miriam lifted a shortbread cookie from the table and nibbled. She felt as if her hands needed something to do. "You wouldn't happen to know who *he* is, would you?"

"Who?"

"Over by the piano."

Elaine looked at the man.

"That's Mr. Ngala. Thomas Ngala. I don't know much about him, only that he owns a chain of import stores here in town."

"What kind of import stores?"

"Oh, I don't know. African odds and ends mostly. Masks, carvings, ornamental spears—that kind of thing."

That night, while Miriam had her ten o'clock cup of tea and muffin in her private quarters on the ninth floor, she couldn't help thinking of Thomas Ngala and of his little black knife. Was he a Mau Mau, a member of the political cult made up of Kikuyu tribesmen? Was he the man with the little black knife? She took a sip of her tea, then put it aside. She needed something stronger.

1956. At the height of the Mau Mau rebellion in the Kenya highlands. Sitting in a circle surrounded by Kikuyu tribesmen and Thomas Ngala asking who shall be next for his little black knife. Or tell him where units of the King's African Rifles were and there would be no more little black knife.

Miriam stopped halfway to the liquor cabinet. She saw the little black knife, the blade about a foot and a half long, floating before her, covered with blood.

Please. The King's African Rifles. We know they were here last night. No? Who shall be next for my little black knife?

They untied her and brought her to the center of the ring where

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the ground was soaked with blood. Now only Heather, Barbara, and Camilla were left in the slowly diminishing circle.

She shuddered, even though she was hot. She crossed the floor and pulled a bottle of Courvoisier from the liquor cabinet. Dead ghosts from long ago, she told herself, pouring a double tumbler of cognac.

The next day she tried to watch Thomas Ngala, but she was busy and had only two opportunities. As a nurse practitioner in the senior citizens' building she was always busy, mainly with minor complaints. And this week she had to give routine physicals to the newcomers, twenty-eight in all.

She was able to observe him in the games room playing shuffleboard with one of the other residents for fifteen minutes snatched from her lunch hour. To think that they were both here, in America, so far away from where it had happened in 1956. The Tana flowing nearby. The thornbush and acacia and baobabs billowing in the breeze, a bowerbird coo-cooing in the branches above them. He was the man with the little black knife. Here after all these years, like a bogy. Like a ghoul, haunting her. She was getting a workout, as the girls used to say on those giggling nights at the farm in Kenya before the King's African Rifles had requisitioned their compound for a command post, before the Kikuyu had moved in afterward to find out what they could and incidentally kill three young women. She was about to be the fourth, but then there was a lot of shouting, gunfire, and Thomas Ngala took a bullet in the back as five troops of the King's African Rifles came through the baobabs to save them.

At dinnertime she observed him as he ate the marinated chicken with a roll and salad in furtive bites, as if he were suspicious of everything around him. He sat alone, made no attempt to fraternize with the other residents, watched everyone closely as if he were waiting for something to happen. He was black-black, true African black, and his phrenological contours screamed Kikuyu.

Kikuyu. The name would always frighten her. Yet now, thirty-three years after, she had come to understand the Mau Mau ends, if not exactly their methods.

Thomas Ngala came for his physical the next day. Beforehand, she read his medical file thoroughly. Thomas Ngala. Born 1915, Embu, Kenya. Languages: Bantu and English. Occupation: merchandising. Next of kin: none. History: three myocardial infarctions

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since the age of seventy-one, skin cancer of the ear successfully treated three years ago, angina, a salt-reduced diet. But nothing at all about the thing she wanted to know. Nothing about a gunshot wound. She read further. He suffered from chronic arrhythmia, hypertension, and occasional breathlessness. Prescriptions included propranolol, glyceryl trinitrate, and digitalis.

When he entered the examining room, she grew nervous, fearful, stalked by the things that had happened thirty-three years ago. He wore a colorful African short-sleeved shirt and a pair of red running shoes. He looked at her suspiciously and she could see he neither liked nor trusted doctors. She tried a few pleasantries but he was disinclined to talk. She put the sphygmomanometer cuff around his arm, inflated it, and took his blood-pressure. It was high but not unmanageable. She looked into his eyes with the ophthalmoscope, checked his ears, nose, and throat—they were, for his age, in good shape. Then she asked him to take his shirt off. He did so reluctantly.

There was a circular scar on his back the size of a bullet hole.

The examining room disappeared and she was back on the banks of the River Tana, seeing Thomas Ngala running away, blood streaming from his back, his arm twitching and his legs stumbling before his friends grabbed him and hurried him into the bush. She looked at the scar, a light tan color against his prune-black skin, and tried to swallow. Her mouth had gone dry.

"What's this?" she said. "Your medical file doesn't say anything about this."

"Gunshot wound," he said in his deep resonant voice, the same voice that had asked, "Who shall be next for my little black knife?" "World War Two. North Africa."

Her muscles hardened with hatred. Liar, she thought.

"It says here you're from Kenya."

He nodded.

"I spent a summer there back in the Fifties," she said. "On an agricultural-exchange project from Britain. It was during the Mau Mau rebellion. Were you there then?"

He shrugged, as if he wanted to go. "I spent the Fifties in Egypt," he said.

Liar. She listened to his heart and lungs through his back, so overwrought she could hardly hold the stethoscope. When the examination was over and she was left alone in the room, she had to sit still for a long time. She saw the little black knife slicing into

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Jennifer's throat, tearing through her windpipe, and Jennifer's shocked eyes turning glassy as the life seeped out of her.

The previous night they had felt so safe, with the King's African Rifles using the farm as a command post. She saw the flies collecting around Elizabeth's dismembered limbs, heard sudden gunfire as the King's African Rifles emerged from the dense bush near the river's edge. Liar, she thought. Murderer. Her stomach heaved and she felt as if she were going to be sick.

She took a few deep breaths, then walked to the dispensary for some anti-nausea medication. She was just washing two of the small blue pills down with water when her eyes settled on the second shelf where the digitalis, digoxin, and heart-related prescriptions were kept. She picked up one of the tiny vials of digoxin, a drug that increased heart-muscle contraction, could actually cause a heart attack if the patient were given too much, then put it back on the shelf. She would have to do this, she thought. She would have to do it for Jennifer, Helen, and Elizabeth.

She got her chance two weeks later. While Thomas Ngala was playing shuffleboard with one of the other residents, he suffered heart failure. Two staff members rushed him on a stretcher to the infirmary. As a nurse practitioner, there were only a limited number of things she could do. His skin had lost its sheen and become the color of a dusty old puck. Her assistant, Marjorie French, a young woman in a white uniform, stood by, unsure of what to do.

"Go phone an ambulance," said Miriam, "and wait for them in the lobby."

When she was left alone with Ngala, she examined the Kikuyu once more. His eyes, though open, were pale and unseeing. He was breathing shallowly. The veins in his neck were engorged, and edema had started. He looked as if he were suffering from cardiogenic shock as well.

"You thought you were going to get away with it, didn't you?" she said.

He was semiconscious, unable to comprehend.

"But I know who you are," she said. "Oh, I know who you are, all right."

She acted quickly, with firm resolution. She filled a syringe with a triple dose of digoxin, the exact medicine heart failure required, and held it up before his eyes. "You see this?" she said. "This is my little black knife."

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She rubbed his arm with alcohol and gave him the full injection. Three minutes and forty-six seconds later, Thomas Ngala died of a heart attack.

There was never any suspicion. The doctor, when he came three hours later, was satisfied with her explanation. None of them could ever know there was any connection between herself and Thomas Ngala. Two staff members wheeled the body to the freight elevator down to the morgue in the basement. The undertakers were called and so were the lawyers.

It was eight o'clock the next morning, with the body still in the morgue, when the lawyers reached her at the infirmary extension. They said the sole beneficiary would like to see the body and look after the funeral arrangements personally.

"Sole beneficiary?" she said. "But I thought there was no family."

"There isn't," said the lawyer. "This is an old friend. A man by the name of Michael Tboya. When should I say he can come?"

Miriam felt numb. She hadn't expected this.

"Tell him to come any time he likes," she said, her voice high. "I'll be here."

Michael Tboya was a short man, as black as Thomas Ngala, and she tried to place him in that group of Kikuyu tribesmen on that hot Kenya day so long ago. But he looked unfamiliar.

She took him to the morgue. There was a weak smile frozen to his face. He was upset but was doing his best not to show it. "So you and Mr. Ngala were friends," she said. "I'm very sorry. I know how hard it must be."

"Good friends," said Mr. Tboya. "We have known one another for a long, long time."

In the morgue he lifted the sheet and looked at his dead friend's face. After some moments he let the sheet drop. He looked at Miriam. "Where are the papers?" he said.

"They're upstairs. Would you like some coffee? I have a pot brewing in my office."

"I don't like coffee," he said. "Would you have any juice?"

"Yes, I could get you a juice."

On the elevator up, they stopped at the third-floor snack bar to get a carton of orange juice.

She was going through her files, looking for the appropriate forms, when Tboya, sipping his juice, began to talk about Ngala, how they

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had known each other since 1931 and how they had been business partners.

"So you were in on this import business, then," Miriam said.

"Yes. Since the very beginning. Ever since our days in Egypt. We started in Cairo."

Miriam stopped looking for the form.

"Egypt?" she said.

"Yes. That is where we got our business started. In fact, most of our contacts are still there and Cairo is where we get most of our merchandise."

She continued looking for the release forms, and when she found them she realized she must have gone past them at least three times. She pulled them out, clipped them to a metal clipboard, and presented them to Michael Tboya.

He began filling them out slowly. "We go back such a long time," he said. "We were in the war together."

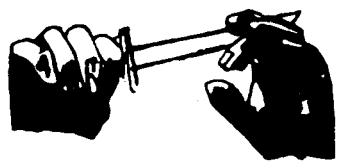
"War?" she said. "What war?"

"The Second World War. King's African Rifles. We fought outside Tobruk. As a matter of fact, Tommy was wounded there. He was shot in the back."

"Did you say he was in the King's African Rifles?"

"Yes," said Tboya. "Of course, today they're known as the Kenyan African Rifles." His eyes narrowed and he leaned forward. "Are you all right, Mrs. Lancaster? You don't look well. Is there anything I can do?"

"No," said Miriam. "No, nothing at all."



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a ***NEW*** short story by

LIONEL BOOKER

"We're very grateful you're with us, Dugan," Leonard Farrell, producer of Make Room for Me, *assured the actor. His voice was filled with enthusiasm. "We've got it all worked out. You'll be Thurman's brother, who rushes to the family's side after his death. By incorporating real events and emotions into the plot, we have a whole new line of possibilities. We can use the uncertainty of it all. You want to help, but you're an outsider. The kids try to accept you but also want to stay loyal to their father's memory. Elaine has been devastated by Tod's passing. They were quite close in real life and she'll have a hard time adjusting. We'll show that in her TV character. Above all, we've got to stay honest . . ."*

ONE BIG HAPPY FAMILY

by LIONEL BOOKER

"It's the people, not the premise."

Leonard Farrell leaned back in his chair and smiled expansively at the actor seated across from his desk. He indicated a bronze plaque hanging on the wall. "The network gave us that award when we passed our third year. So far we've picked up six Emmys, and this year the ratings have been better than ever before."

Dugan Murray gazed dutifully at the plaque. It was no secret that *Make Room for Me* was one of the hottest sitcoms on television. In this era of fast-disappearing half-hour shows, it was consistently holding its own in the Top Twenty week after week since its debut four seasons ago.

"You can't tell me," Farrell went on complacently, "that *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* made it because it was set in a newsroom in Minneapolis or that *M.A.S.H.* became a classic because it dealt with

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the Korean War. It just happened that they brought together a group of people who clicked, who had that special chemistry that made audiences tune them in every week. They could see the genuine affection the actors felt for each other."

He leaned forward and picked up a red-covered script, waving it like a victory flag.

"So what have we got here? A basic, run-of-the-mill family comedy, with the usual bumbling father, loving mother, and two cute kids. Why did it hit so big?" He tossed the script on the desk and tapped it significantly, slowing his voice down for emphasis. "Because Tod Thurman played the father, Elaine Brubaker is the mother, and Sue Grandville and Jimmy Lovel are the kids. Each one has done shows before—films, guest spots, commercials—but this is the first time they've worked together. Together they're—they're a real family."

Dugan looked back at the walls. All around him were photographs of the cast of *Make Room for Me*. Some were magazine covers, some were publicity shots, some were surrounded with texts from articles and newspaper clippings, the titles reading: "The Hawkins Don't Stop Caring When the Cameras Turn Off," "What Sue Grandville Learned from Her Make-Believe Parents," and "Tod Thurman's Favorite Date Is His Favorite TV Wife." All depicted the four actors with broad smiles and in warm, intimate poses.

His eyes rested for a long while on Tod Thurman's face. Farrell must have sensed his slight pang of guilt because he spoke in a sympathetic voice.

"It was a tragic accident, but these things happen. You didn't ask for this opportunity. The important thing is the show."

It was early that season when Thurman was playing a scene about plastering the ceiling of the living room. Clad in coveralls, he had to mount a high scaffold about twelve feet off the ground. The structure gave way during the taping before a live audience, plummeting him to the hard sound-stage floor. The audience, thinking it was a planned bit, howled with laughter until Farrell sped across the set and bent over the unconscious actor. He then informed everyone that the taping had to be discontinued while Thurman was rushed to the hospital for emergency treatment.

The next morning the country felt it had lost a dear friend when it woke to the news that Thurman had passed away in the hospital due to unexpected complications. What had been diagnosed as a broken arm and mild concussion, plus external bleeding, had sud-

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denly become more serious during treatment as inexplicable physical reactions proved fatal.

Thurman was a double-divorcé who had no children, and there wasn't even a next-of-kin listed in his wallet when he was brought into the hospital. His main mourners at the funeral were the shattered cast members and the production executives, who saw his death as the end of a long and lucrative enterprise. Farrell was alone in his belief that a successor could be found. Hundreds of actors were auditioned before Dugan Murray was selected. He not only resembled Thurman, but Farrell was sure he would project the same charm and appeal.

"We're very grateful you're with us, Dugan," the producer assured him, having risen and placed a hand on the actor's shoulder. His voice was filled with enthusiasm. "We've got it all worked out. You'll be Thurman's brother, who rushes to the family's side after his death. By incorporating real events and emotions into the plot, we have a whole new line of possibilities. We can use the uncertainty of it all. You want to help, but you're an outsider. The kids try to accept you but also want to stay loyal to their father's memory. Elaine has been devastated by Tod's passing. They were quite close in real life and she'll have a hard time adjusting. We'll show that in her TV character. Above all, we've got to stay honest."

The next day Dugan reported to the sound stage for the first reading of the new episode—the episode that would introduce his character. He could feel the tension as he walked to the long table where the cast sat studying their scripts.

Elaine Brubaker, an ash-blonde woman in her thirties with a beautiful face, was the first to look up at him—with eyes that looked as if she had been crying a good deal lately. For a moment she and Dugan stared at one another, and then she forced a welcoming smile and held out her hand. "Hello," she said. "This is going to be difficult for you, I know, but we'll do everything we can to help."

Sue and Jimmy were also staring at him now. They had more trouble masking their apprehension, but they managed to nod and say hello.

"Thank you," Dugan said, sitting down next to them. "Thank you for knowing I'm just as frightened as you are."

At the other end of the table, the writers exchanged glances and made notes.

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Dugan's words became the first line his character uttered in the show that week.

The ratings of *Make Room for Me* remained respectable as viewers tuned in out of curiosity, but the true test came a few weeks later when the novelty of the new setup wore off. To everyone's delight, the show began a steady climb, which eventually put it back into the Top Twenty. Then it climbed further. By mid-season it was consistently in fifth or sixth place—and four months after Dugan Murray's first appearance, the show became Number One throughout the country.

To Dugan it was a new lease on life. Not long ago, his wife had died, leaving him alone after fifteen wonderful years. Acting parts had been scarce as he moved out of the leading-man category into character roles. There had seemed to be little future for him in his profession, and the loneliness of his personal life was becoming unbearable. But now he was considered a star. Every minute of every day was spent in rehearsals, performance, or promotion. He was photographed wherever he went and most of his time off the set was spent at premieres, charity functions, supermarket openings, and award ceremonies.

Jimmy and Sue had finally accepted him openly and treated him almost as if he was their real father. The older, Jimmy, reminded him of himself in his early twenties. Like him, the young man yearned to be a big name and was impatient with anything that interfered with that ambition. Dugan could sympathize with that and gave him understanding when others criticized him as insensitive—even ruthless.

Sue's loneliness reflected his own. There was a rule against family and friends visiting during working hours, so that they wouldn't distract from the performers' family relationship, and the girl's parents were content to keep away from her and not endanger her paychecks. Dugan was happy to fill this void in her life as best he could.

Best of all, there was Elaine. Since the first day, he had been attracted to this kind, lovely woman who had made things so easy for him. She brought back the tenderness he had known with his wife, and they would often dine together—a fact not unnoticed or unwelcomed by the production executives.

"Here's to our twentieth anniversary," Elaine said as she raised

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her glass. Dugan clinked his against it and gazed at her through the candlelight on the restaurant table. "Twenty weeks ago you joined us."

She had never married, he learned. She said she never found anyone who could tolerate her. She had started out as a fiercely ambitious ingenue in New York, where she had done a few Broadway plays before she was brought to California for her first film—a dismal failure at the box-office that did much to weaken her self-confidence. Four more unremarkable movies led her into television, but the big break never came and she had become known as a serviceable leading lady until she was cast as the mother in *Make Room for Me*.

"You've been good for us, Dugan," she said, drinking champagne. "Everybody's so happy with the way things are working out."

"It's been wonderful for me, too, Elaine," he answered, taking her hand. "But I keep thinking about Tod. I know how close you both were, and if it hadn't been for that accident he'd be sitting here instead of me."

Her face clouded. "Don't think that way. Poor Tod. It was so sad watching him suffer toward the end."

"Suffer?"

"He wasn't as happy as the rest of us. Something was bothering him. Something that was growing worse every day. Leonard tried to talk to him, but it didn't do any good. In a way, it was almost as if he wanted to die."

Two weeks later, Dugan reported to the studio to rehearse the last show of the season, which involved the family getting ready to go on vacation. He had spent the weekend in Palm Springs with the rest of the cast, posing for stills to be used as publicity during the summer hiatus.

In reality the actors had all received offers for feature-film work now that they were free for a spell to pursue outside jobs. The only restriction was that Farrell had to approve the roles and pictures before they could accept them, to make sure they wouldn't damage their image in the series.

Dugan was glad to see the end of the season because he had to admit he was getting a bit weary of spending all his time with the same people and under such heavy restrictions.

When he entered the sound stage, he was surprised to see the living-room set gone. He knew the plot was going to take place in travel agencies and they needed the space for the new scenes, but

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it was still strange to see the old familiar set missing from the spot where it had stood for four years, long before he came. The floor had become discolored in the areas where the wall sections had been.

Dominick, the prop man, came up to him and handed him a small cardboard box. "I found all this stuff when they struck the set. Check them out, will you, and ask the cast if any of it is theirs?"

Dugan nodded and took it over to the long reading table where Sue Grandville sat alone with her script, staring at the blank space before them.

"It's like seeing your own home torn down, isn't it, Princess?" Dugan said. She returned his smile. He sat down and showed her the box, telling her what the contents were. Together they examined a collection of pens, keys, coins, pieces of paper, and a small metal bracelet that attracted Dugan's eye. He picked it up and wiped some of the dust and grime off. It was an oval attached at each end to a thin, broken chain. Dugan turned it over and over in his hand, looking at it closely.

"What's that?" asked Sue.

"It's a medical bracelet," he told her. "My wife used to wear one because she had diabetes. People with certain physical problems use them as a precaution in case they need medical attention and can't speak for themselves—if they'd been knocked unconscious in an accident or had an epileptic seizure, say. Doctors are trained to look for them. They're wonderful. My wife was never without hers."

"You know," Sue said, "Tod wore one like that. I always meant to ask him what it was."

"Was he diabetic?"

"I don't know." She looked up as Jimmy came toward the table. "Jimmy, you know that thing Tod wore on his wrist? Dugan says it was a medical bracelet. The prop man just found one when they struck the set—"

She broke off abruptly. A strange look had come on the young man's face. At first Dugan thought it was fear but then decided he was angry, so angry the blood was rushing to his cheeks. "Wardrobe's been looking for you," Jimmy snapped at the bewildered girl. "You have a fitting session."

"But—"

"Never mind, just come on. I was sent to find you." He almost yanked her to her feet. Dugan watched them disappear in wonder. He had never seen Jimmy act like this before. He was still puzzling over it when he returned the box to Dominick . . .

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Later, during a break, he saw Sue sitting alone in the audience section. He started toward her to ask her about the incident, but when she saw him coming she got up and moved away. It appeared to Dugan as if she was avoiding him and he didn't pursue her.

Toward the end of the day, after the run-through for the production staff, he noticed Jimmy in a heated conversation with Farrell. The boy pointed to his own wrist and waved his head in Dugan's direction. When he walked off, Farrell came over to Dugan with a smile on his face.

"Did you hear they found my medical bracelet today?"

"One of the crew showed it to me. It's yours, then? I thought—"

"Well, not mine," Farrell cut in amiably, "it's my wife's. She has high blood-pressure. I was going to have it repaired when I lost it last week. We were just about to have another one made."

In the parking lot, Dugan saw Dominick getting into his car and couldn't resist asking him where he'd found the bracelet.

"Oh, that? It was wedged between the base of the living-room wall and the floor. It had been jammed in there so tight we couldn't see it until we took the set down. —Mr. Farrell? No, he never claimed it was his. I haven't seen him all day."

"Why are you making such a big thing about it?" Elaine asked him as they drove home that night from a charity ball, where they had been named honorary chairpersons. She had seen his troubled expression when he arrived and got him to tell her the whole affair.

"I wouldn't have," he answered testily, "if everyone hadn't acted so strangely." They were both tired and had an early call in the morning. "Jimmy sounded mad at Sue for telling me about Tod's bracelet and she looked damned scared when I tried to talk to her later. And why did Leonard lie about it?"

"Lie?"

"He said it was his wife's bracelet. For one thing, Dominick said he never stopped by for it, and for another it was too dusty to be lost last week. And I read what it said before I put it back, and there was nothing about high blood-pressure."

Elaine began to look worried.

"Dugan, you're very tired right now and you shouldn't trouble yourself about this."

He sighed. "I suppose you're right, but there's something I can't get out of my head. Tell me, was Tod wearing his medical bracelet at the time of the accident?"

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"I imagine so. I wasn't there when he fell. I was backstage. When I got there, Leonard wouldn't let me see him. He was afraid I'd go to pieces. But I did go to the hospital after they took him there. He was wearing a pair of coveralls with no pockets and I took his personal things to him. There was no bracelet with them, so he must have had it on."

They drove in silence for a moment.

"I read about it in the papers," Dugan said. "Tod was unconscious, but his injuries weren't that serious. It was during treatment that he died. Since he was bleeding, they probably gave him antibiotics." His voice grew soft. "Elaine, that bracelet that was found today. It said 'Allergic to penicillin.' "

He heard her gasp. "Oh, Dugan," she whispered in a horrified tone. "You mean that's what killed him? His bracelet had broken off and he couldn't tell them—how awful!"

"Yes," he answered quietly. "It *was* awful." But, he thought, it still doesn't explain what happened today.

In the morning he tried to forget the whole thing. The entire cast was going to be presenters at an awards ceremony that night and they had a full day of rehearsal before them.

The scene called for him to enter with a vacation poster in his hands, but when he called for Dominick to bring him the prop a stranger appeared. "Where's Dom?" he asked.

"He's not with us any more, Mr. Murray. They transferred him to another show today. Don't worry, I've got the poster here."

Dugan took it woodenly, feeling a cold chill in the pit of his stomach. He leaned against the flat, the apprehensions of the previous day flooding back. They had to repeat his cue three times before he responded.

"Are you feeling all right?" Farrell asked him that afternoon as Dugan lay stretched out on the couch in his dressing room. "They tell me you've been behaving a little strange on the set today."

"I'm just tired, Leonard," Dugan said evasively. "I wonder if it would be okay if I missed the awards ceremony tonight."

Farrell's eyes narrowed. "We've already told everyone you'd be there, Dugan." There was a coldness in his tone Dugan hadn't heard before. "If you're sick, we'll have a doctor look at you, but if it's only because you're tired—well, we all have our obligations to the show. I know you don't want to neglect yours and hurt everyone else. After all, we're one big happy family here."

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Dugan swallowed. There was a look of suppressed rage on the producer's face as he stared down at him. "Of course, Leonard," he said quickly. "I'll be there."

At nine o'clock he and Elaine sat alone in the green room of the TV studio, waiting to go on and present their award, she in a blue evening gown, he in a tuxedo. They silently watched the monitor showing what was happening onstage for a while and then he said, "Elaine, tell me about Tod."

"Tell you what?"

"You said he was suffering toward the end. Was it because of the show? Was he unhappy spending all his time living this make-believe existence without a chance to relax, to be himself? They don't even want us to have outside friends. They watch every move we make—as if they owned us."

She frowned. "He did resent it. I know how he felt. We all get tired of it sometimes."

"Did he threaten to do anything about it?"

"What could he do? He had a contract."

"No one can contract a life. Agreements can always be broken if a man is willing to pay the price. He'd just lose the income, maybe go through a lawsuit. Was Tod so sick of this that he was prepared to pay that price?"

"I don't know," she answered uneasily. Her eyes were on the television screen but she began to twist her hands in her lap. "He and Leonard had some arguments. He never told me what they were about, but I know they were angry with each other. He'd sometimes shout at the kids, too. Jimmy especially."

"I reread a newspaper account of his death. Leonard was the first one to reach him after the fall, wasn't he?" She didn't answer. Dugan lowered the volume on the monitor. "Elaine, if Tod left the show under such circumstances, it would have ruined the family image that's kept it going. Everyone would learn things weren't as blissful as they'd been led to believe. This is a multi-million-dollar project and it would all be lost. Especially for Leonard. A TV series doesn't make any money for the producer until it goes into syndication. Right now only the networks are making a profit—Leonard's just getting a salary. But when the rights of the show revert back to him after its first run, he can make a fortune from the reruns. If the show is discredited now, if it's taken off the air and loses its appeal, or alienates the audience, he'll lose everything."

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"Dugan, I can't listen to any more of this. Do you realize what you're saying? You're suggesting Leonard killed Tod."

"Elaine—"

"That's unthinkable! More than that, it's impossible! That scaffold was checked to see why it gave way. A safety board proved it was a worn-out rope that hadn't been tampered with. How could Leonard know it would break when Tod got on it? How could he plan the kind of injuries he'd receive and then rush up to him before anybody else, rip off his medical bracelet, and send him off to the hospital knowing they'd give him penicillin?"

"That's not what I'm saying," Dugan cut in sharply. "I know it didn't happen that way. Leonard couldn't rip off a metal bracelet, and even if he could he would have put it in his pocket, not dropped it on the floor. No, it must have caught on something when Tod fell. That could even have been what broke his arm. It was a one-chance-in-a-million accident, but a lucky one for Leonard. When he reached Tod, he could have seen the bracelet lying on the floor, knowing what it meant. We all had to take complete physical examinations when we were hired, and those reports were sent to the producer. He knew the bracelet would help Tod. He saw he was bleeding and there was a possibility they might give him penicillin. His hatred for him, the man who was going to ruin everything for him, could have been so great that he kicked the bracelet out of sight and waited to see what happened."

"He might have *accidentally* done that! Or someone else did!"

"Yes, but then why did he lie about it? Why was Dominick, who found it and told me about it, sent away? And what about Jimmy? Sue didn't know what the bracelet was for and you were backstage and didn't know it had come off. In fact, Leonard kept you away so you couldn't have known. But Jimmy could have mentioned it when they took Tod away."

"He forgot! Or he didn't notice it was gone! Dugan, what's happening to you?"

"He was furious at Sue when she told me about it. He scared her away from me and talked to Leonard just before Leonard lied to me. Jimmy's an ambitious kid. He wants to succeed more than anything else and this show is helping him do it. Tod was as much a threat to him as he was to Leonard."

Tears were streaming from Elaine's eyes. "Dear God, Dugan. If you're right, what are we going to do? Go to the police?"

He shook his head, trying to get hold of himself. "No. You're right

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that there's no proof they did it deliberately. I'd give anything to believe this is all my imagination. But don't you see? Until we can know that for sure, we could both be in danger. If we complain or refuse to show complete cooperation, if they suspect we might want to bow out at any cost, we could be next."

At that point they heard their names announced on the monitor and realized they were being introduced. For a moment, they froze, and then they got up and rushed to the door, not daring to be late.

Friday was taping day and the actors didn't have to be at the studio until early afternoon. Dugan decided to use this rare moment of freedom to look for the proof he needed, and he went to the hospital where Tod died. He debated asking Elaine to come with him but remembered how haggard she looked when he took her home on Tuesday night. She had been shaken by Dugan's suspicions, and he decided he wouldn't talk to her further about them until after he'd spoken to the doctor who had attended Tod. Perhaps he'd have good news to tell her, news that would show that his worries were groundless.

Doctor Shigunta was a heavy-set Japanese-American with a friendly, open manner. He was puzzled by Dugan's visit and at first reluctant to discuss the case with him, but he was also a fan of the show and couldn't help looking on the actor in the role he had seen him play so often—that of the deceased's brother.

"We did a post-mortem on Mr. Thurman," he said, "and the official cause of death was the reaction to the antibiotic."

"There was no indication that he was allergic to penicillin?"

"Of course not," Dr. Shigunta said emphatically. "If there had been, we certainly wouldn't have administered it."

"I'm told Tod wore a medical bracelet to that effect and that it was broken off during the fall."

Dr. Shigunta shook his head. "I'm sure you must be mistaken about that."

"Why?"

"Well, people who wear such warnings don't rely exclusively on them. There is another precaution. They also carry a card on their person, issued by the company, that says the same thing as the bracelet. It even gives the name of their doctor and a telephone number we can call twenty-four hours a day."

Dugan gripped the chair arm. Of course. His wife had carried the

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card in her purse. She was never without it. He had forgotten about that.

"Did you look through his wallet?" he asked the doctor.

"Yes. We took everything out of it. He hadn't been carrying the wallet, but we got it from his wife—excuse me, I mean the woman who plays his wife on TV. She had all his personal effects and handed them to me here in the hospital. We found no card."

As usual they did two tapings of the show, one in the afternoon by themselves and one before an audience that night. During both performances, he marveled at how good Elaine was. She was a wonderful actress and it was too bad she hadn't received the acclaim she deserved during her younger days. But at least she had it now, if she could hold onto it.

Another thought struck him as he lay in bed that night, hoping for a few hours' sleep to escape from the growing certainty of his fears. He had never told Leonard Farrell who had found the bracelet—he had just said it was one of the crew. But he had mentioned Dominick's name to Elaine when he related their conversation in the parking lot.

The film Dugan made during the summer hiatus never found a distributor and was finally shelved. The projects the other cast members had accepted didn't do much better. It seemed the only hold they had on success was the sitcom they did together, and each one reported back to work in the fall, grateful for the money, security, and fame it brought them in an extremely precarious business.

Dugan never mentioned Tod Thurman again, nor did he consider going to the police. In fact, he went out of his way to appear completely contented with his lot. When the seven-year contracts expired for the original cast members, he was quick to assure everyone—especially Leonard Farrell, Jimmy Lovel, and Elaine Brubaker—that he intended to sign up for another seven years as willingly as they no doubt did.

There was a rumor that Sue Grandville, now of age and no longer legally controlled by her parents, was going to get out of show business, but it proved to be unsubstantiated.

"Why would Sue want to leave us?" Leonard Farrell asked the reporter who had brought up the rumor. He had his arm around the quiet girl, whose broad smile belied what looked like a sparkle of terror in her eyes. "After all, we're just one big happy family."

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a *NEW* short story by

ROBERT BARNARD

Unemployment, that's what did it. Sitting around all day with no money, no hope. Steve had had a friend—a nice, normal kid—who'd gone and strung himself up under the strain. In his own case, there'd just been one big, explosive row.

"Robert Barnard's mystery stories are among the best now being written," wrote John Gross last year in The New York Times. *"In one sense, he is thoroughly contemporary. But he is also a traditionalist, constructing puzzles in the spirit of Agatha Christie and, in a number of stories, playing with literary themes in the spirit of a Michael Innes or an Edmund Crispin . . ."*

A GOOD TURN

by ROBERT BARNARD

In the darkness, the young man couldn't find a bell or a knocker, so he banged with his fist on the front door. Then he leaned his head against the cool brickwork of the strange house, his stomach heaving. Inside, all was still, and he stood up and banged again. This time his fuddled brain became aware of a dim light appearing in an upstairs window, then of the window opening. It was just then that his gut began audibly churning.

"What the hell do you want?"

"Mr. Jacklin? Fred Jacklin?"

"No, it's not. What do you mean, banging on my door at this time of night?"

"It is number fifty-seven, isn't it?"

"No, it's thirty-seven. Why, you filthy young bugger—"

For his stomach had finally risen in revolt and was emptying itself over the gladioli by the front door. As more lights came on in the

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house, the boy fled down the path, out the front gate, and down the road.

Fifty-seven. It must be on this side of the road. His head seemed clearer now. Funny that—that clearing out your stomach like that should affect the brain. Nice houses. Bigger than your average semi. A damned sight better than Mam's back-to-back in Gateshead—all the rooms so poky, with damp on the bedroom walls, and the two of them getting under each other's feet and on each other's nerves.

Unemployment, that's what did it. Sitting around all day with no money, no hope. He'd had a friend—a nice, normal kid—who'd gone and strung himself up under the strain. In his own case, there'd just been one big, explosive row.

Number fifty-seven. That was in darkness, too. Went to bed early round these parts, didn't they? He looked at his cheap wristwatch. Half past eleven. No time. No time when you didn't have to get up early in the morning. When you didn't have to get up at all. This is a nice house, he thought. A semi, but a big, substantial one. Room to move about, be yourself, keep yourself to yourself if you wanted to. Garden could do with a bit of attention, though.

He went up the path, and in the darkness felt around the heavy wood front door till he found the bell. It played the first notes of "Home Sweet Home."

Again there was silence on the other side of the door. Well, he supposed, if you were in bed the natural thing was to hope that whoever it was would go away. He rang again. This time there were stirrings on the other side of the door—a light upstairs in the distance, then the sound of someone shuffling slowly down the stairs. The door did not open.

"Who is it?"

"Mr. Jacklin? Dad?"

"What did you say?"

"Dad? It's Steve. Your son, Steve."

There was silence on the other side of the door. Well there might be, Steve was sober enough now to realize. Then he heard the sound of bolts being drawn across. The porch light came on, but no lights inside the house. The door was opened, but only to the limits of its chain, which was left on. Dimly he perceived a face appear in the crack.

"What do you want?"

"Dad—it's Steve. I'm your son."

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"So you said. Bloody funny time to pay a visit."

"I was in Birmingham. I had a row with me Mam and hitched a lift down."

"You been drinking?"

"Yes. I was a bit sloshed. I knocked on the door of number thirty-seven. But I'm all right now. I just wanted to see you."

The scrutiny continued.

"I can see your mother in you. I suppose it's all right." The figure on the other side fiddled with the chain and the door was opened. Now a light was put on in the hall. "Go through to the kitchen. We'll have a cup of tea."

As Steve went through to the kitchen and found the light switch, the hall light was extinguished. He smiled briefly. He knew North Country people, his people—they were "near." He and his mother had to be. His father originated, he knew, in Bradford. So if he was careful with electricity, it was only to be expected.

His father came into the kitchen now and pottered over to the sink, filling up a kettle and setting it down on the gas ring. When he turned, it was Steve's first view, first proper view, of him. It was something of a shock. He had known that he'd be older than his mother, but this man was about sixty, an old man. And he looked it, too, to Steve's eyes. He was wearing an old-fashioned woolly vest, buttoned at the neck, and grubby flannel trousers with braces, hastily pulled on when the doorbell rang, no doubt. His face was wrinkled, and there was a heavy stubble on chin and cheeks that suggested that his last shave had been the day before. But he was at least wide awake. There was a sharp glint in his eyes.

"So you're Steven." He seemed to have difficulty finding anything to say. Not surprising in the circumstances. "Last time I saw you, you were—how old?"

"Two. Me Mam says you left when I was just over two."

"That'd be about it. Women remember these things. What do you do, then, Steve?"

"Nothing. I'm unemployed. I've been on schemes—youth employment schemes and that. But they're all fakes—nothing comes out of them. There's nothing in Gateshead at all. Twenty-five percent out of work. It's diabolical."

"It's bad here, too. Very bad. You need to go south, the southeast. That's where the work is."

"I know."

He hadn't expected a warm invitation to make this his home,

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though he had wondered whether he mightn't stop here for a week or two, maybe a month—getting to know his father, helping in the garden. But the drift of the old man's remarks thoroughly chilled the impulse. There was silence again.

"How's your mother?"

"All right. We just about manage. She has a couple of cleaning jobs, but they're a bit dicey. She helps out at the corner shop if they're short-staffed now and again. We're both around the house most of the time, so we get on each other's nerves. We had a big bust-up last night."

His father screwed up his face. "Always had a temper, your mother."

"It were me as well."

"Nasty tongue with it."

"Is that why you moved out?"

It came out more baldly than he had intended. He had always had a curiosity about his father and what had happened before and after his birth, but he hadn't intended to show it by any sort of inquisition. But the old man did not seem disconcerted.

"I never moved in." A cunning smile twisted the gnarled face and Steve saw blackened stumps of teeth. "I know a trick worth two of that. Living with her would practically have been admitting the brat was mine."

"Me."

"That's right. I never lived with your mother. I just slept with her, and slipped her money now and again. She was all right. She inherited that house when your grandparents died."

"It's not a bloody stately home!"

"She was all right," repeated the old man. He poured the tea into two cups and came across to hand one to Steve. His body smelt of meanness and neglect. When Steve tasted the tea, he found it had not been sugared. Seeing a packet on the table he went over and spooned some in, then he squatted on the edge of the table, watching the old man, his father, rolling a cigarette.

"You got a dog?" he asked, fingering a dog lead that was lying on the table. "Not much of a watchdog."

"He's in the garage. He's old, and lost control of his bowels. I'm sick of clearing up his bloody messes. He's deaf, too. I'd have him put down, but it all costs money."

"Sounds like he'd be happier."

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The old man shrugged. The boy felt a sudden turn in his stomach which was not due to drink.

"So when I was two you just took off down here?"

"I didn't take off. I sold the business up there and bought a business down here. What's that fancy word the Yanks use? Relocated. That's what I did—I relocated."

"You never told me Mam, though, did you?"

"Oh, she *has* fed you a line, hasn't she? Well, there was no cause to tell her. She was the girl at the counter, the girl behind the cash register, that's all *she* bloody was. Did she expect to be treated like she was co-director? It was a nice little business selling plumbers' supplies, but she was about the smallest cog in the outfit."

"You didn't tell her until it was all wrapped up, then you said she needn't bother to come in on Monday."

"Saved a bloody scene, didn't it?"

"And that was the last she saw of you."

"It was. Mind you, I sent her a bit of money from time to time—has she told you that?"

"Peanuts."

"Money doesn't grow on trees."

Steve looked around. "You seem to have done all right."

"Anyway, if I'd sent her anything big, or sent money regular, that would have been practically acknowledging you were my son. I never did that."

"I am, though?"

"Oh, aye. I can say that now you're grown up."

"Oh, yeah—marvelous! Thanks! You acknowledge me now I'm grown up and no one's going to grant a maintenance order against you."

"That's right." The old man smiled a smile of horrible complacency. "Let me give you a bit of advice, free, gratis, and for nothing, son. There's always folk out there waiting to take you for a ride. You'll never get anywhere if you sit back and let 'em. In this world, there's mugs and there's them that take advantage of the mugs. In my book, there's nothing to be said for being one of the mugs."

"I could kill you."

The words came out flatly. They sprang unbidden from disillusion, from the shattering of hopes he didn't know he had cherished, from a sudden, overpowering distaste.

The old man took no notice. He shrugged and turned to wash up his cup. "Well, that's my philosophy, like it or leave it. I didn't ask

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you to turn up here, and if you were expecting a tearful family reunion you were off your rocker."

Possessed by a new desire thoroughly to frighten this miserable, mean-spirited old man who was his father, Steve spelt it out, speaking low and intensely. "I could kill you. I could put that doglead round your scrawny throat and I could pull it tight and throttle you and no one in this world would care a damn that you were gone."

Still the old man was more puzzled than frightened. He stubbed out his cigarette in an overfull ashtray. "What would you do that for? I never done you no harm."

"Fathers are supposed to do their sons good." Steve reached out and took up the dog lead. "It would almost be a public service. You'd have been done away with, like that old dog that you're too mean to put out of its misery. And no one would think of coming after me, because you haven't got a son, have you? You've never been mug enough to acknowledge you've got a son."

"Don't be daft." There was a tiny quaver of fear now in the old man's voice, showing that Steve's intensity had got through to him. "Your fingerprints'd be all over this kitchen."

"I've never been in trouble with the police. My prints won't be on their files."

"You said yourself you knocked at number thirty-seven. You'll have been seen."

"I was spewing my guts up over their gladdies. They didn't see my face. And what if they had? I'm not known here, and I wouldn't be here by the time the police found you." He tested the leather leash in his strong young hands and slipped off the table he had been sitting on. "I could strangle the life out of you and you'd probably lie on this floor till your body rotted and the stink was so foul that someone outside got a whiff of it. I could snuff you out like a candle—use the life you gave me to put an end to yours."

"Why?" There was open fear now in his face as the boy took a step toward him.

"Because of the way you treated my mother. You didn't just treat her bad, you treated her mean—and you thought yourself bloody smart while you were doing it. And because of the way you treated me. You can't just bring life into the world and slope off as if it's no concern of yours."

"People are doing it all the time."

"They shouldn't." He was now very close to the man, could smell his body, smell his breath. "And because I've never existed for you,

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I could kill you and nobody'd be any the wiser, nobody'd come after me, and my name wouldn't even come up."

Now he was standing over him, undeniably threatening.

"You young thug! Keep away from me!"

"*You're* the thug. Hit and run, f—— and run—it's the same principle."

"You're dirt! That's what your mother has brought up—a lump of s——!"

Possessed by he no longer knew what compulsion, to frighten or to kill, the boy suddenly put the lead over the man's head, got his ducking body firmly under his, and tightened the leather around his neck, pulling, pulling.

"Stop! You can't—!" The voice was thick, choked, almost petering out. The boy kept pulling.

"I've left you everything!"

The words got through what seemed like a blanket of blood around the boy's brain. His hands paused.

"I've left you everything! There was no one else—you're my heir! The police will be coming after you, all right!"

Steve's hands slackened—the leather relaxed its throttlehold on the old man's windpipe. As the attack faltered, his father lay there very still. Suddenly, the boy stumbled over the pathetic heap, ran through the kitchen and out to the front door. As he pulled the door to, he heard from the kitchen a hoarse, scraggly laugh.

Next day, standing on the motorway, thumbing a lift from the cars streaming north, Steve felt almost lighthearted. From time to time, he did in fact laugh. He would never know whether he had been his father's heir, but he sure as hell would not be it much longer. That was right. He had had nothing from him, wanted nothing of him. He would go back to Gateshead, make it up with his mother, then head south looking for work. He'd see if one of his mates who'd gone down to London could put him up. Failing that, he'd get a bed in a hostel. There was work, if you could keep clear of the people who wanted to get you on drugs or into prostitution. He'd survive. He had a life ahead of him.

And it would be a life unstained by—that act. He would never know whether he would have gone through with it to the end, but a terrible gut feeling told him he would have gone on pulling tighter. It was that cunning old sod that had stopped him. His father had saved him. For once in his life, he had done someone a good turn.

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DETECTIVERSE

ANOTHER GRAVE TONE

by JAMES HOLDING

Here lies cat burglar Danny Deane,
Whose death was due to a change of scene.
Danny was agile, Danny was strong,
His balance was perfect, his reach was long,
So he made a career, did burglar Dan,
Of being a second-story man.
He'd shin up a drainpipe or scale a wall
And rifle the bedrooms to make a haul
While the owners were downstairs watching TV
Unaware of a visit from Danny D.
But working up north in his search for gold,
In winter poor Danny got awfully cold—
Got frostbitten fingers and chilblains to boot
In order to gather in adequate loot.
So Danny decided, after a time,
To move to a warmer, more clement clime,
And picked out a spot on the Florida coast
That was full of rich people and warm as toast.
But Danny found out when he settled in
And was ready to have his new life begin
That thoughtless developers, rascally gnomes,
Had built all the houses as one-story homes.
So without any two-story houses to rob,
Poor Danny was virtually out of a job.
What should he do when a city comprises
Just one-story homes and lofty highrises?
Well, Danny decided to raise his sights
And try to resume his burglorious nights—
But, alas, he raised his sights too high,
Which is why his bones hereunder lie:
While climbing a condo to make a score,
He fell off a ledge on the thirteenth floor.

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"How did you happen to pick me, particularly?" Sal asked Stowers. None of her ads mentioned her sex or even her first name . . .

HOLE IN THE WALL

by DAN CRAWFORD

There were racks wherever I looked. Stretched on them were all shapes and colors of people, displayed in the most unflattering positions ever conceived by the mind of a photographer. I picked up a magazine just to reassure myself that the contents were never quite so lurid as the cover. I set it back and studied the array again. In any one of these magazines, or, more likely, any five or six, I might find the woman I had come to look for.

"Come here often?" inquired a shadow that had stepped up to me across the worn linoleum.

"No," I said. I turned to look at him and he backed away. That's what my face does for me. Then he stepped forward again. That's what his mind did to him.

"I knew that," he confided, peering at the side of my head where my hair covers a spot formerly occupied by an ear. "I come by all the time and I'd notice any unescorted ladies." He glanced around to be sure I was unescorted and stepped closer. No one objected.

In fact, I smiled. This almost always sends them to the bar for a quick one. But he was intrigued. "I bet you look hot in black leather," he crooned, his voice cracking seductively.

It was Sunday afternoon. What I wanted to be doing was sitting in front of the tube, learning how many light-beer commercials the human mind could absorb in quick succession. But I wouldn't get paid for that.

"You wouldn't be *too* cruel to a naughty little boy, would you?" He moved in close enough for me to smell his breath. It was an optimistic mixture of mouthwash and breath mints.

Before I made a reply, a little bell rang informing us that the first show of the afternoon was about to start up. I hustled away to a hole in the wall that led to the murky concrete back room. My swain

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chivalrously let me go in ahead of him, sliding his hand down my back just to be friendly. I'd have slugged him, but I think he was hoping for that.

I'd been in enough of these places to know which of the little booths to avoid. I slid into the first one that didn't have the Occupied sign lit up and locked the door behind me, barely missing a set of pale-pink fingers. I heard the door next to mine bang open and shut.

In the grey light of one little shielded bulb, I found the coin slot and dropped in half a dozen tokens. The black window shade slid up in front of me.

It turned out to be a much fancier presentation than I'd expected, given the setting. There was actually a plot, and dialogue, and costumes. All three were alike threadbare, but that they had bothered at all with these things when there were people in the booths expecting impacting flesh for their tokens was almost a shock.

There was even some singing, which gave it away. The proprietor had simply taken an old live-sex floor show and built booths around it. It was pretty behind the times, with the rest of the block going in for higher-tech video booths, but it was different. I gave it two and a half stars.

The story was something unsightly and unseemly, having to do with dogs, lampposts, and fire hydrants, all played by human beings. The hero was known as Big Red and the heroine was one Fifi, who was not built like any poodle I'd ever seen. On her left hip she had a daisy tattoo, but as she started to sweat it ran and melted off. That's entertainment.

The rest of the cast had similar talents, and they were all pretty good at covering grimaces of discomfort with moans of passion. The thumping from booths around me told me they were a big hit with the crowd. I could also make out gleaming eyes in the booths beyond the stage of beige linoleum. From the simulated enthusiasm with which the actors went through the motions, I'd have thought they'd all been in this racket for years. Some of them looked it. But I'd caught sight of a little mole shaped like a football on one of the fire hydrants, and she had on a little silver bracelet I'd been told to watch for.

This was what I'd been to fifteen of these little shows to see, but now I had to sit through the rest of this little exhibition. The booth was hot and close, and felt even more airless as the performers

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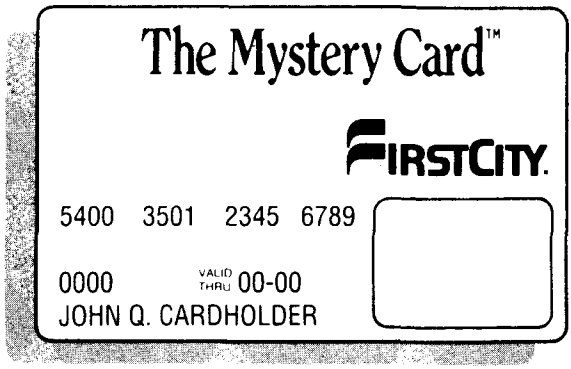
Mystery

Take the Mystery Out of Credit Cards

With the First Credit Card for Mystery Readers!



As a reader of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* you enjoy red herrings, twisted endings, and the surprises that make mystery reading such a pleasure. But no one likes to be surprised in areas of personal finance.

With all the confusion surrounding credit cards these days...interest rates, grace periods, and other details...we're pleased that First City is offering a MasterCard to our readers that will not require you to hire a private investigator, or an attorney, to help you decipher the benefits.

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The unique gothic mansion design expresses your interest in finding clues and solving mysteries.

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Diabetes is a metabolic disorder that adversely affects the body's capacity to produce and use insulin, a hormone necessary for the conversion of food into energy. Approximately one out of every twenty Americans suffers from the disease. **And, there is no cure.**

Your use of "The Mystery Card" can help the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation discover the clue to the cure of diabetes!

Mystery

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"The Mystery Card" is a MasterCard accepted by six million MasterCard merchants worldwide. There's no mystery about its value.

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replaced their dialogue with panting. Maybe the heavier they breathed, the more they got paid.

The show didn't so much end as dissolve—the characters slipped from the stage to be replaced by a tag-team of confetti wrestlers and a sadistic cleaning woman. (I'd explain all this, but you really had to be there.)

Once I was sure the fire hydrant I wanted was gone, I set out for the front half of the building again. I'd forgotten about my would-be bosom pal, though, and let my door thump shut.

He was out of his own booth in seconds, and stood between me and the corridor, smiling a mournful little smile. "So," he said, "do you want to come up to my place and tell me how disgusting I was to come here?"

"Not today," I told him. "I have to go back and talk to one of the girls."

Revulsion curled across his face. "Boy," he said, "you can't tell who the creeps are these days." He stepped back into his booth and slammed the door. I moved past to the magazine section of the establishment.

A balding, weary soul sat behind the front counter, reading *Car & Driver*. He looked like a man who had heard everything and didn't like any of it, so I decided a good offense was my best bet. I leaned on the counter, keeping my hands where he could see them. He glanced from his magazine to my face, but the guys behind these counters aren't supposed to scare easy.

"Something I can do for you?" he said.

"You the manager?"

He shook his head. "I just work here."

"My name's O'Neill," I told him. "I'm looking for a runaway: underage. You've got some new girls in the show I want to see close up."

"All my—all the girls are legal age," he said, sitting up straight.

I raised both hands. "Sure they are—sure they are. But I've got to talk to them and make sure."

He looked me up and down. He smiled. "You know Jules?"

He was asking me to be afraid of an alderman. I could play. "Sure I know Jules. I was at Geraldine Meade with his twins." (I had read a campaign brochure about Jules and his neat children, and the name of their private school stuck in my head. It's amazing the things that come in handy.)

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"Mm," he said. He actually got down off the stool and pulled a ring of keys from his pocket. "Back this way," he said.

I moved around the counter, keeping an eye on his hands to be sure nothing else came out of his pockets. "Want to come along and introduce me around?"

He shook his head and stood aside. "I just work here," he said. He didn't want anybody identifying him as the manager in case I did run into any illegal employees.

I walked up two steps and then along a narrow, dark corridor that wound around the showroom to the green room. They hadn't gone in for fancy, gloomy paneling here—we had cheerfully peeling-off yellow paint on cinderblocks. I could smell the room before I reached it. A thick, not completely revolting organic odor poured from it. And a couple of flavors of smoke mingled with the smell of soup and coffee that sat on a hot plate surrounded by paper cups and open bottles of mouthwash. On my left as I came in, I saw an open shower stall and a toilet. Fifi was sitting there repainting her daisy.

Two naked light bulbs dangled from the ceiling, throwing a hot white glare on naked, dripping members of the troupe. They were bent over a wobbly table, sorting out discarded bits of their costumes for reassembly.

"Are these your ears or mine?"

"That's my hat. Who stepped on it?"

"You didn't bark much—I'd do better with a real dog."

"I believe that."

They looked more like human beings back here—too human, almost, for my comfort. I stepped into the light.

One or two looked around at me, looked again, and then nudged a neighbor. But no one moved to stop me as I walked across the cracked floor. They knew I couldn't have gotten back here without permission or a lot of muscle.

Beyond the shower stall sat a woman in a loose pink robe, passing a half dead hair dryer around her head. She looked pretty. They like to get the pretty ones to do the ugly jobs. "Excuse me," I said, standing between her and the light.

She pulled one side of the robe over herself and looked up. Bright-red lips dropped open. "What happened to you?" she gasped.

"Someone spanked me with a buzz saw," I told her. "Are you Zenobia Stowers?"

She took a long breath and started to form an answer. "Before you

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deny it," I told her, "you should know that your initials are on that bracelet."

Her eyes closed and she put a hand over the little silver oval that read *ZCS*. She sighed. "I never could do a damned thing right."

"Don't be like that," said Big Red, patting her on the head on his way to the shower. "There are several damned things you do really well."

We pulled away as he turned on the water. "Is there someplace we can talk privately?" I asked.

She looked me over for a second, but I knew her name, so she decided she had more to lose by refusing than accepting. "Sure," she said. "Come on."

She got up and crossed to a door in the far wall. There she paused and glanced at me over her shoulder. "Say, you aren't from the *Herald-Tribune,* are you?"

"No," I said.

"Ah, he'll never call back," she said, unlatching the door. "I should've known it was all a crock. Who did you say you were?"

"Sal," I said, holding the door as she passed through.

She stopped and turned to give me another look. She was cute: plump round cheeks and big brown eyes, red-rimmed. She had a long white neck and an all-over pale, not an inch of tan about her anywhere. Once she had summed up what she thought of my looks, she moved on without a word, tightening a pink belt around her waist.

At the end of a short hall, we reached another door. She unlatched this, too, took a quick peek outside, and, lifting a key from a nail by the door, stepped out. I followed her.

We were in the showroom again. She led me to one of the little booths set aside for courting couples who look for romance in all the wrong places. She sat down close to the door and started to rub a bruise on her thigh.

"So," she said. "Who are you?"

"Sal," I said again.

"I heard," she told me. "But that's just a name. What do you want?"

"Well," I said, "I'm a private investigator. I—"

"Dad sent you, right?"

I didn't deny it. "He wants to know where you went and why you left. He thought there might be a man involved."

She had been looking down at the floor, her eyes half closed. Now she raised her head to sneer, "Just one?"

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I had known this would be the hard part. "Is this an improvement over home?" I asked, looking around the booth. "Couldn't you have done better?"

She pointed a finger at me. "I had lots of places I could have gone. I just thought no one would look for me here."

A shrug was all the apology she got from me. I sat down. She stood up. "The work doesn't bother you?" I asked.

"Money's a good, antiseptic lubricant."

"Okay," I said. "But this has got to be one of your higher-risk occupations."

"A chance of AIDS beats definite starvation," she said, pointing that finger again. "And, hey, it's indoor work."

"Gonna be a star someday, huh?" I said. "A real porn queen."

She shook her head. "I'd just as soon be a little fish in the pond," she said. "No one goes after you and, if they do catch you, sometimes they throw you back."

There was something in that sentence somewhere. I took the "they" and filed it for future reference. "It's not a good address, either," I went on. "There are people who like to catch the little fish. If they kill enough, they've got a meal."

"It might not be so bad, getting killed," she told me. "That's something they can only do to you once."

I didn't suppose there was much that had only been done to her once. But I didn't mention it—instead I said, "So everything's fine with you? This is the height of your ambition?"

She turned away. "I might've liked to go to college," she said. There was a spasmodic shrug after that to show it was just a passing thought, that she didn't care about it, not much, not really.

"So go," I told her. "They operate on the Listen Now, Pay Later Plan these days."

"Nah," she said. "This is all the education I need. There are all kinds of things I never knew I could do for money, and I'm learning more every day."

"I believe it." I tried a slightly softer tone. "Why not get out of here while you can? Go home and see if you can put your life back together."

She didn't face me. "Out of what?"

It was no fair for her to use my old arguments. "You mentioned the *Herald-Tribune,*" I said. "What were you looking for there?"

"Oh, nothing," she said. "Nothing. He won't call back."

"Who?"

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She turned to me and was about to speak when she tipped her head to one side, listening. "You got a token?" she asked.

I reached into my pocket and found one. I handed it to her. She dropped it into the coin slot and our little window went up. A vaguely Middle Eastern-looking woman was tying scarves to various parts of her body on the stage. "She's getting to her finish," Zenobia said. "I've got to get back and get dressed. Been nice talking to you."

She went for the door. I put a hand against it. "I'd like to talk some more sometime. Where do you live?"

She didn't say anything. "You can come to my office," I went on, "but the elevator's been out for weeks and I'm on the fourth floor."

She still didn't say anything. "I do think we need to talk some more," I told her. I wasn't holding the door shut—she could have been out by this time if she'd wanted to be.

"Well, I always *have* done as I was told," she growled. "Stone Street, Lo's Place, Room 22."

"Okay," I said. "Tonight?"

Now she did open the door. "Around ten."

"That early?"

She lifted her chin. "I'm on the afternoon shift today," she said. "*And then I go straight home.*"

So she had some pride left. "I'll be there, Zenobia," I said.

She nodded. "See you, Sal." She went over to the door we'd come through, unlocked it, and disappeared among the shadows. I had no desire to stay and watch the show, so I moved on out. A man who can't have been quite legal age saw that I was leaving time on my window and slipped inside to take my place.

In the magazine room, the man behind the counter glanced at me. "You find who you were looking for?" he asked, as though not really interested.

"Nope," I said. "Looks like everyone here's of age." It was true as far as I knew. Zenobia was actually nineteen and free to be a fire hydrant if she wanted to be.

I walked back to the office and climbed the three flights of stairs to my cubbyhole. I washed my face and hands twice and changed my clothes. Half my joints ached. I took inventory to make sure everything was still attached, then I sat down, took a deep breath, and dialed Charlemagne Stowers.

"Stowers," he said.

"O'Neill," I replied.

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"Yeah?" he said. "Any luck?"

"Some. But we never got as far as deciding what you wanted me to do with her once I found her."

"You found her?" he demanded. "Zenobia?"

"Yes," I said. "Now what?"

"Now what?" he demanded. "Why—bring her back, of course!"

"She's nineteen," I reminded him. "I can't drag her to your house. And she doesn't sound like she wants to come back."

"Where is she?" he said. "Is she there? Let me talk to her."

"She's at work," I said, shifting the receiver to my better ear. "She got a job, just the kind you suspected. I'm going to talk with her after work."

"Where?" he asked. "I'll go with you."

"I don't think so. Stone Street's not your kind of neighborhood. And I think I can talk to her better alone. Maybe I can find out what her problem is."

"She didn't tell you?"

"No," I said.

"All right," he told me, "do it your way. But I'll be at your office first thing in the morning."

"I'll tell the cleaning lady to let you in," I said. We hung up on each other.

I leaned back in the chair and rubbed my forehead. Was it worth going home just to come back this way at night? Or should I just unfold the cot and take a nap here? Did I feel up to unfolding the cot? Maybe there was some work I ought to be doing. Maybe there were some bills to pay. Once I started writing checks, unfolding the cot would seem a lot less trouble.

I opened the desk drawers to hunt for some envelopes. A copy of *Stripes* magazine was lying on top of a ream of scratch paper. "Round, Ripe, and Reddened by the Lash," said the starburst on the cover. I had had parents bring me pictures of their missing daughters before, but never like this. I turned to page seventeen, which came after page forty-two, and looked over the pictorial feature headed POSITIONS OF SUBMISSION, paying particular attention to the shot in the lower right corner.

"That's Zenobia," Mr. Stowers had told me when he tossed the magazine on my desk. "I want you to find her. I think she's working down in one of those places like Puss in Booths and—"

"Slow down just a little, please, mister," I'd said, not used to confronting *Stripes* magazine that early in the morning. I looked him

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up and down. There was plenty of up. At the top of his six-foot something-or-other was a greying head with wrinkled jowls and furrowed brow. "Who are you and what's Zenobia to you?"

"Zenobia's my daughter," he informed me. "I'm Charlemagne Stowers. Here's my card."

His card did say Charlemagne Stowers. And he had named his daughter Zenobia, another case of the sins of the grandparents being visited on the grandchildren. "I think I've heard your name before," I said. "It's not the kind that's easy to forget."

"Maybe you've seen some of my work at the Scorpi-Crown Gallery," he suggested.

I hadn't, but I had read a writeup on it in the *Herald-Tribune*. He took pictures of quaint old rusty El columns and half empty baseball stadiums to sell to homesick expatriates whose money had forced them to go live in the burbs.

While I was remembering that, he had flipped the magazine ten pages to page thirty-two, where the same girl was featured on the losing end of a wrestling match where the creative use of props exceeded what they allow on television wrestling. "I came to you because you're a woman," he said. "You can see this might be a delicate kind of job."

"How did you happen to pick me, particularly?" I asked him. None of my ads mention my sex or even my first name.

"Oh, a guy I used to work with mentioned you," he said. "He said you used to work at the Harris but went out on your own."

"Suddenly they didn't like my looks any more," I told him. I consulted the magazine. "You're sure this is your Zenobia?"

"Yes," he said. He flipped over to a page and pointed. "It's the mole here and—" pointing again "—that's the bracelet her mother gave her. She hasn't taken it off since her mother died."

I looked up. "When did her mother die?"

He shook his head. "Ten, eleven years ago."

"So that wasn't something that would have made her leave?"

"No," he said. "I don't know why she left. She'd always been a good kid. But as they get older—" He shrugged.

I flipped the magazine over to look at the cover. "Where'd you pick this up?"

He shrugged again. "In a store."

"Okay," I said. "Has she sent you any letters? Did she leave a note?"

"No."

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"How long has she been gone?"

"A month." He sighed. "I should have come sooner, but I thought she'd come back. —I think she's still in town, acting out sick fantasies in one of those holes in the wall."

"That'd narrow the search," I said. "But why would she have stayed, do you think? Usually the first thing they think of is getting out of town, out of reach."

"You're the detective." He pointed again. "Look at the pictures. She's got a different haircut in the ones in the second feature. There'd have to be some time pass between the two sets. And she had to make contact, get talked into the job, and all that before they even took the first set. She's only been gone a month."

I didn't think his reasoning was all that solid, but it was possible. So I did look at the snapshots. They were all underexposed (no joke). It was an amateurish job of photography and I said so.

"Maybe," he admitted. "Who says the guys who work down there are all that professional? Zenobia always wanted to go on the stage. Somebody could have given her some line about being with The Theater and her needing to have a portfolio to get auditions. All kinds of characters can claim they're connected with show business these days. You should have seen some of the sickos I met in my newspaper days, covering the entertainment beat, taking pictures of those orgies they called New Wave Theater. Zenobia's too naive to know the difference if they got her in one of those shows down there."

He went on for a long time like that. He was obsessed with the horrible vision of his little Zenobia prancing on a stage in the red-light district. I tried to get his mind off it, asking for Zenobia's vital statistics, who she knew in town with a car, how much money she had when she left, who she knew who lived outside of town. Nothing could distract him. I've met these old rakes before—every woman in the world is a hot piece except their daughters, who are sweet and naive and made of some purer flesh too good for mere mortal men.

If I couldn't get him off the subject, I could at least get him out of the office. So I did, after first getting a few more conservative pictures of Zenobia to show around. I promised I'd check out all the local sleaze parlors.

Stripes' address was a post-office-box number, so I'd started with the peep shows. It was more than likely that the magazine changed

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its post-office box regularly to shake off snoops like me. All the porn publishers were being extra careful—business had slumped a bit during the crackdown.

Now I checked through the fine print, waiting for it to be ten o'clock and wondering what I'd say to Zenobia. There might be a name or number I had missed in all these tiny letters that would give me a second line of attack just in case my fire hydrant had lied about her address.

There wasn't a thing—just line after line of cautions and caveats to cover what their models didn't.

"Not for sale to minors. This magazine is published for the purpose of illustrating the increasing acceptance of the nude human form in all its aspects in contemporary culture. All photographs, unless otherwise stated, have been posed by professional models. All models are over 18; proof of age on file. We do not furnish information or addresses on models. Neither photos nor captions are intended to depict the actual conduct or attitudes of the magazine's editors. We do not advocate the use of force."

And so on and so on, in language less free-spirited but more creative than the text, down to the address and copyright notice. I wondered if they really sent two copies of this to the Library of Congress to register copyright and, if so, whether my senators keep a page waiting at the desk to see if it came in.

I studied the post-office-box number and copyright date until I decided I'd take that nap, after all, and locked the magazine into a file cabinet—under Z, for Zenobia.

A little before ten that night, I found a bus that was going my way and borrowed a ride. The driver checked me two or three times when he saw where I signaled for a stop, but I was none of his business. It was my life, if I wanted to risk it.

Some of the streetlights were broken, but it was early yet. I can look like a deformed, demented street person without even trying, and they wouldn't be desperate enough to go for that until the more provident people started going home.

Lo's Place wasn't hard to find, though the face of the sign was peeling away. It was the only building on the two blocks of Stone Street that hadn't been boarded up. I kicked my way through the trash on the sidewalk to step up on the porch. No doorman came to meet me.

It didn't look too gruesome inside, considering how it smelled.

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Nobody asked me what I was doing. There was a kid eating beans from a can, but when he saw me he put his hands over the beans and ran up the stairs. I followed, but stopped at the second floor while he carried the can off to the third.

A light was on in Room 22. I knocked, but no one answered. I knocked again, then set my good ear against the door. Nothing moved inside.

I decided to go in. Someone was either screaming or singing on the third floor and it made me nervous. I tried the knob and the door opened. This seemed both unlikely and unfortunate.

A plastic-foam box with the hamburger still in it crunched and squeaked under my foot. The floor creaked and the cheap metal bed by the window creaked along. On the bed, aimed at the door, was a face even worse than mine. Zenobia didn't say hello.

She was trussed in a classic pose, strangled by the rope that was taut between her throat and her ankles. Several red rings on her neck showed how the rope had been slackened a few times so she could revive and be killed again. Whoever had done it had stuck a red flower in her hair.

I had pretty well decided she was dead, but I wasted some time trying to find a spot not wrapped in rope where I might find a pulse. There was blood on the sheets, and on the floor around the bed, probably indicating she had fought back. A trail formed a straight line about halfway to the door before it petered out. Just where it stopped, three spots formed a little triangle.

A nightgown and a pink-plastic wristwatch sat on a broken chair by the bed. I left the watch alone but ran my hands over the nightgown to feel if there was anything underneath. There was only the chair, half its caned seat missing.

Frowning, I turned to check the window. It was painted shut and an empty picture-frame was resting against it. No one was hiding in the closet. I could see it from where I was standing. Unless Zenobia was mighty sloppy with her clothes, someone had been there and had tossed everything on the floor.

I turned again to consider Zenobia, dressed in only the rope and that flower. Then I went out and shut the door gently behind me.

I waited in a shadow until the bus came by, then I stepped lively. The drivers don't feel obligated to stop for you in this neighborhood if they don't like your looks. This is tough luck for me, but if it keeps them alive I don't knock it. He did stop, and I rode downtown to

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whisper sweet nothings to a cop I know. After that I went home and tried to sleep so I could get to the office early.

I hauled myself up the three flights of stairs good and early, but Mr. Stowers had gotten there earlier.

"Well?" he said, snapping into a state of alertness that was unholy at seven A.M. on a Monday.

He didn't look like the screaming and fainting kind. "I was too late, Mr. Stowers."

I waited. He said nothing.

"Zenobia's dead, Mr. Stowers," I said.

"I see." His face was granite. "How?"

I opened my mouth, but he leaned in at me. "Who did it?" he demanded.

He didn't let me answer. "I know," he said, shoulders sagging. "Those people down there don't live by any rules. You just have to read your newspapers to know that. I know—I've seen them. I've been there."

I unlocked my office door. "How recently, Mr. Stowers?"

"What?" he said.

I moved inside and pushed through the reception area. "It'll be interesting to see how the *Herald-Tribune* covers this story," I commented.

"Oh, nobody'll write anything about it," he said, following me. "One more kid killed down there, one more runaway, who cares?" He had a camera slung around his neck and gave it a savage shove.

"Just the same, I'll be watching the *Herald-Tribune,*" I told him. I opened the bottom drawer of the file cabinet. "You brought me this magazine so you could send me down there to look for Zenobia without telling me how you knew she was there. That old pal of yours on the *Herald-Tribune* tipped you off: Zenobia was going to talk to some reporter and spill her story."

"What story?" he demanded.

I slapped *Stripes* down in front of him. "This magazine is two years old, Mr. Stowers."

He peered at the cover. "How do you get that? There's no date on it."

I flopped the cover open. "It's in the fine print—the copyright date, paperwork to satisfy the bureaucracy. And you told me your daughter was nineteen and had only been away from home for a month."

"She—" he began.

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"Then there's the lead-time involved," I said. "A magazine doesn't buy pictures and use them in the very next issue. Here, look—the page numbers don't run in sequence. This is a special issue—they pasted it together out of pictorials lifted from their previous issues. These might be anywhere from a year old to twenty years. That's why the pictures are so bleached out—that makes it harder to tell her age." I pointed at his camera. "To do that on purpose would take a professional."

"Yeah?" he said.

"Yeah," I told him. "My money says you've been doing this for years—using your daughter for fun and games and making a little spending money on the side by selling pictures of it. When she got too old for you to control, you threw her out. You never would have bothered with her again if you hadn't had that call from the *Herald-Tribune*. You went out and found a non-agency detective to find her without being too nosy about your private affairs. When you heard about Stone Street you killed her, not very nicely. That's several very naughty things, and one major mistake."

"Ha!" he said, dropping into a chair. "You make up worse fantasies than the sick minds who put out that magazine. Even if it were true, you can't prove the slut in those pictures really is my daughter any more than you could prove that a dead prostitute on Stone Street is."

"No," I said. "Because you were careful to take her bracelet and the picture of her mother. But all I really have to prove is the murder. Let them dig the rest out of you in court."

I smiled to show him all my teeth, the real ones and the ones I'd paid for. "Did you see any squad cars near your house this morning, Mr. Stowers? If you'd gone to your studio, you'd have seen some there, too."

"Bitch," he said. "They won't find anything. I have everything but Zenobia's old class pictures tucked away where they won't look."

I shrugged. "And did you wash your tripod, too?"

He frowned. "Wash—?"

"The legs made a mark on the floor where you set it up. I'm betting there's some blood left on it yet."

His mouth drew in and his eyebrows came down. He was trying to remember.

"But Zenobia told me something when I talked to her." I sat down behind my desk and took out some paper. "She still loved you, somehow, and she said she didn't really want you hurt."

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He gave me such a smirk I could have dropped the desk on him. I'd known he'd go for this. "So if you'll just confess now, in writing," I said, "I'll give you three days to get gone before I turn the paper over to the police."

He eyed the paper. "You'd get in trouble for that," he said. His eyes rose to me.

I smiled again and he winced. "Not if there was enough money involved."

He shook his head. "I'll need all my money where I'm going."

"Then how about the camera?" I pointed at it again. "You took pictures as she died, right? You couldn't have resisted. Well, I can sell those as well as you can."

He ran a hand across his mouth. "Yeah," he said, dragging it out. "Yeah, you could." Nodding, he lifted the strap from around his neck. "They'd give me away, anyhow, I guess. What should I write?"

I took the camera and told him what he wanted to say. Once he had signed it, I took possession and stood up. "It's been very profitable knowing you, Mr. Stowers," I said. "Now we have to get you out of here. These'll be worth less than nothing if you get arrested on the way out and the police seize them. They may be watching now. Here, turn up your collar. Pull your hat down. Right. Okay, let's look." I peered out into the hall. "Come on."

"I can't see a thing," he complained, putting a hand up to hold the hat in place.

"I'll get you to the street," I said, taking him by the sleeve. "After that, you're on your own. Hold it—let me make sure you'll be the only one in the car." I gave the elevator door a yank. "Okay. Let's go."

He took three steps, screamed, and let go of his hat. One hand clutched at me, but I hadn't wanted his fingers on me and had stepped out of reach. That elevator hadn't worked in weeks. Pity my office is only on the fourth floor.

"Mr. Stowers! *Oh, Mr. Stowers!*" I shouted. He was yelling so loud I had some trouble getting his attention.

"After I've dropped some things off at the stationhouse," I told him, "I'll call you an ambulance."

I forget what he called me. It was probably accurate.

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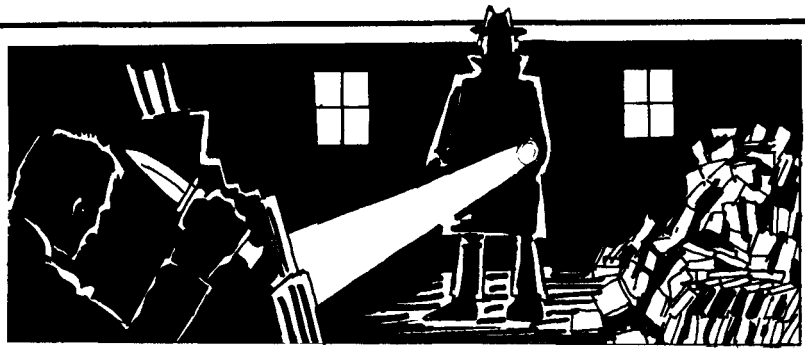

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THE JURY BOX
by JON L. BREEN

Readers of this magazine don't need to be told that the late Jack Ritchie (1922–1983) was one of the most talented and original writers to specialize in the mystery short story. But during his lifetime, only one collection of his stories was published, the paperback original *A New Leaf* (1971), which owed its existence primarily to the title story, originally called "The Green Heart," and adapted into a successful film starring Walter Matthau and Elaine May. In 1987, editors Francis M. Nevins, Jr., and Martin H. Greenberg collected some of Ritchie's tales between hard covers for the first time in *The Adventures of Henry Turnbuckle* (Southern Illinois University Press)—29 satirical variations on the classical mystery featuring two *EQMM* favorites, the gifted and imaginative but fallible cop (occasionally private eye) Henry and his long-suffering partner Ralph. A more recent collection, also edited by Nevins, presents a varied assortment of non-series Ritchie tales.

**** Jack Ritchie: *Little Boxes of Bewilderment: Suspense Comedies,* St. Martin's, $17.95. In spare, usually tongue-in-cheek style, Ritchie and his first-person narrators (who are never quick to tell everything they know) play unending games with their readers, few of whom are likely to outguess them often. The 31 stories, most originally published in *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* with a handful from *Manhunt* or *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine,* range in date of original publication from 1959 to 1971; 13 of them recur from *A New Leaf.* Nevins' Introduction is recycled from the Turnbuckle collection, but the 18-page checklist of Ritchie stories is new and very valuable to collectors.

**** George C. Chesbro: *Second Horseman Out of Eden,* Atheneum, $18.95. Dwarf detective Mongo Frederickson and his brother Garth go through such mental, physical, and emotional trauma in each adventure, one wonders how they can come back for more. This time, their search for an abused child who has written a letter to Santa Claus involves them with a world-threatening plot based on biblical distortions. Chesbro's wild roller-coaster rides mix detection with science fiction and fantasy but manage to keep a center of humanity and rationality in the amazing Mongo, one of the great characters of recent mystery fiction.

*** K. K. Beck: *Peril Under the Palms,* Walker, $18.95. In her third case, flapper sleuth Iris Cooper, still traveling with her Aunt Hermione, visits Hawaii and solves a neatly plotted murder puzzle. Beck does the nostalgia 'tec in fine style, with a straight face and without recourse to a lot of obvious genre references. (In Twenties Honolulu,

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the temptation to bring in Charlie Chan or a reasonable facsimile would have been too much for some writers to resist.)

*** Tony Hillerman: *Talking God,* Harper and Row, $17.95. This is not quite as good as the last couple of Hillerman novels, perhaps because Navajo cops Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee spend most of the book in Washington, D.C., rather than their usual New Mexico locale. Still, Hillerman, one of the present-day masters, is always worth reading, and Smithsonian employee Henry Highhawk, a fair-skinned fractional Navajo obsessed with his Indian heritage, is one of his most memorable characters.

*** Donald E. Westlake: *Sacred Monster,* Mysterious, $17.95. In an enthralling and darkly satirical structural experiment, Westlake tells the story of chemically dependent Hollywood star Jack Pine and his odd relationship with boyhood friend Buddy Pal. Many readers will be able to predict at least some of the climactic revelations, but Westlake's originality and narrative power are as impressive as ever.

*** Harold Adams: *The Man Who Missed the Party,* Mysterious, $16.95. School reunions have always been an attractive scene for fictional murder. Here the undefeated 1924 high-school football team of Corden, South Dakota, gather for their ten-year reunion and Carl Wilcox—unmatched sleuth, untrusted employee of the family hotel, and crisply laconic narrator—clears up the resultant carnage.

*** Michael Underwood: *A Compelling Case,* St. Martin's, $14.95. London solicitor Rosa Epton is convinced her client Stephen Lumley, charged with robbing his uncle's jewelry store with two masked companions, is being framed. A typically enjoyable entry in a reliably low-key and inventive series.

** Thomas Chastain: *Perry Mason in The Case of Too Many Murders,* Morrow, $14.95. The first book-length pastiche of Erle Stanley Gardner's Perry Mason series is a game try. From a flat beginning, the tale gathers steam with a puzzle that is satisfactorily complex and Gardneresque. The solution is cleverly worked out and fairly clued. Still, in the courtroom and out, the novel lacks the snap and crackle of the real thing.

** Carol McAfee: *The Climbing Tree,* St. Martin's, $18.95. Baltimore prosecutor Kate Riley goes after a judge who caused a death while driving drunk, is menaced by child molestor Slick Carlson, and deals with numerous romantic and other personal traumas. The book has a measure of pace and readability, along with the rudimentary characterization, simplistic plotting, and banal style one associates with shlock bestsellers.

By the time you read this, Michael Avallone's *High Noon at Midnight* (PaperJacks, $3.50) will have been out a year and may be hard to find. But if you enjoyed the earlier adventures of movie-obsessed New York private eye Ed Noon, you'll want to seek out his first new case in some fifteen years,

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a wild, unfettered, surrealistic amalgam of mystery, science fiction, and heroic nostalgia that I found insistently readable and enjoyable.

Among the reprints is a new separate edition of Margery Allingham's 1937 short novel *The Case of the Late Pig* (Avon, $3.50), a Golden Age classic and the only Albert Campion mystery narrated by the royally-connected sleuth himself. The late Christianna Brand's *Green for Danger* (Carroll and Graf, $7.95), first published in 1944 and rightly regarded as one of the finest formal detective novels ever written, reappears in a trade paperback edition with nine pages of informative front matter about the author and her work, a new Preface by H. R. F. Keating, and an Introduction by Otto Penzler reprinted from the 1978 Mystery Library edition. More recent revivals include Heywood Gould's fast and funny 1975 book, *One Dead Debutante* (Pocket Books, $3.50), introducing New York reporter Josh Krales, and Richard Martin Stern's *You Don't Need an Enemy* (Pocket Books, $3.50), a suspenseful 1971 entry from the recently revived series about New Mexico cop Johnny Ortiz.

Robert B. Parker's *The Early Spenser* (Delacorte, $13.95), an omnibus containing the first three novels about the renowned Boston private eye, helps to explain how Parker attained his high reputation, demonstrating all of the virtues that make readers eagerly grab each new book and few of the faults that exasperate at least some of those readers. *The Godwulf Manuscript* (1973) and *Mortal Stakes* (1975) are good, but the middle book, *God Save the Child* (1974), is the prize of the group, almost certainly the best of all the Spenser novels. It describes Spenser's first meeting with Susan Silverman and includes a plot that measures up to the style.

Devoted readers of the late Elizabeth Linington, who also wrote as Dell Shannon, Leslie Egan, and Anne Blaisdell, should know about the bimonthly fanzine *Linington Lineup,* available at $12.00 per year from Rinehart S. Potts, 1223 Glen Terrace, Glassboro, NJ 08028. Potts' newsnotes and comments, along with frequent reprints of Linington's correspondence plus documents pertaining to her life and death, amount to a detailed portrait of a one-of-a-kind mystery maverick, though admittedly there is more here than the non-fan will want to know. The May 1989 issue is #23, and the editor advises all back issues are available.

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"Q"

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a delightful reprint by

PATRICIA MOYES

"I wish I could take Dee-Dee, but one can't, with the silly British quarantine regulations," Caroline said. "Still, you'll look after him for me, won't you, Hubert?"

Dee-Dee was Caroline's pet-name for Pakdee, the Siamese on whom she doted. The name she had given it meant "the faithful cat."

For more about Patricia Moyes and one of her favorite subjects, see page 107 . . .

THE FAITHFUL CAT

by PATRICIA MOYES

The fact that Hubert Withers decided one Thursday morning not to murder his wife after all should not be ascribed to kindness, change of heart, nor any moral scruples, but to a mixture of squeamishness and cowardice, plus the realization that he could get what he wanted by other means. Hubert was a small man and had always shrunk from violence of any kind. The thought of actually killing Caroline made him feel quite nauseous. Also, there was the risk of being caught. However ingenious his plan, a husband who stood to inherit his wife's fortune would automatically be Suspect Number One.

Nevertheless, he had to have money—and very soon. It would be nice, of course, to have Caroline permanently out of the way and to come into his inheritance—but he now saw that the matter might be dealt with in a less drastic manner. If he could get her removed for even a short while and get a Power of Attorney to act on her behalf—that is, to sign checks and draw cash—all would be well.

It wasn't that Hubert particularly disliked Caroline. She wasn't

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a bad old thing at all really, although of course he had married her strictly for her money. She was the plain, shy daughter (and only child) of a widower who had made a fortune in the construction business in Washington, D.C., and she stood to pick up the lot when the old man died.

During her life, Caroline Todman had made few friends. At school—an extremely expensive private establishment where all the girls were by definition heiresses—her only real friend had been another girl, also plain but less shy, called Annabel: but Annabel had married the impoverished younger son of a British nobleman and was now Lady Fairley, living in a very grand Elizabethan manor house in southern England—bought with Annabel's money, naturally. Several times Annabel had written suggesting that Caroline should visit England and stay with her and her husband, but Caroline had felt too shy to make the trip alone.

Despite her plainness and shyness, Caroline had had plenty of suitors, as any girl in her position was bound to have, but old Todman, her father, swore he could pick out a fortune hunter at a hundred yards. Even Caroline herself got to be quite good at it, and this tended to increase her timidity and to put her off young men. Thus she had remained unmarried until the age of thirty.

Hubert Withers appeared to be the only man who had ever wanted her for herself alone. He, too, appeared to be very shy, and although he was reasonably good-looking he disguised the fact by wearing unbecoming steel-rimmed spectacles and a wispy moustache. He had been observing Caroline Todman's movements, and so cleverly contrived to meet her for the first time in the Georgetown Public Library. They started talking about books, and he shyly invited her out for a cup of coffee at a cheap cafe, apparently quite unaware of who she was.

Caroline was enchanted, and even old Todman grunted his approval. The young man appeared pleasant enough and seemed stupefied the first time Caroline invited him home to the family mansion, which stood in a couple of acres of garden in superfashionable Georgetown. Hubert had stammered out that he'd had no idea she was the daughter of *the* Arnold Todman. It was an excellent performance—Hubert should really have been an actor.

As it was, however, he confided frankly—but shyly—to his prospective father-in-law that he was simply an impecunious student, several years younger than Caroline, and without any means of visible support except his student grant. He was working, he said,

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on a definitive thesis on the impact of witchcraft on medieval European thought. As a matter of fact, it was a subject which interested him mildly, and he knew enough about it to talk convincingly to a millionaire who had started life as an unskilled building laborer.

Todman gave his consent—but on one condition. The very condition for which Hubert had been hoping. That young Withers should consign his interest in historical research to the status of a hobby and take a job with The Firm.

"Start at the bottom, my boy, as I did. You'll soon make good."

One look at Hubert had decided Arnold Todman that for this frail intellectual the bottom of the construction industry did not mean a job as a builder's laborer. Instead, Hubert was allotted a place in the more comfortable and less strenuous side of the bottom of the business—a glorified office boy, who happened to be married to the daughter of the boss.

This might have worked out very well, except for one fact. It became painfully obvious within a few months that Hubert was simply no good. It was probably just as well that Arnold Todman dropped dead of a heart attack before any of his senior staff had plucked up the courage to tell him that Hubert was, and always would be, hopeless. Arnold died happy, knowing that Caroline was married and that his son-in-law would soon make his way in The Firm. He left everything he had—including his controlling share in the business—to Caroline.

Caroline herself knew very little about The Firm, except that it provided a handsome income. She took the advice of the senior executives of the company and soon began to get a sound grasp of the business. She suggested tactfully to Hubert that since they no longer needed the extra money he should quit his so-called job and go back to the research on which he had always been so keen. Hubert agreed, with relief. His satisfaction with the situation was tempered only by the fact that Caroline, although as plain and shy as ever, kept a tight hold on the family purse-strings.

In the Todman mansion, where they now lived, the magnificent library had been handed over to Hubert for his research work and space cleared on the shelves for his books of reference. Caroline organized the house, dealt with all finances, and kept in touch with The Firm. Hubert spent lonely and frustrated hours in the library. He was regarded with great deference by the household staff.

"The Master is working on his book," the butler would say with

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great severity to a giggling maid or a clumsy kitchen boy. "Don't you know that he needs complete quiet?"

So Hubert got complete quiet, and it nearly drove him mad. In fact, what saved his sanity was that he began to fill in his Saharan hours by gambling on horses.

Naturally, as the husband of Caroline (nee Todman), his credit with bookmakers was excellent. Nevertheless, the fact remained that all he had was the pin-money doled out in cash by his wife—"After all, darling, you can charge everything, can't you?"—and matters had now reached a point where his creditors were demanding payment, and that without delay. He had stalled them for a while by quietly selling a valuable picture from the Blue Morning Room—a place Caroline seldom visited—but that was only a sop to the wolves. Soon the crunch must come.

As Hubert saw it, he had two alternatives. He could confess the whole thing to Caroline, who would undoubtedly pay his debts for the sake of family honor: but thenceforth his life would be untenable. Or he could kill her.

The fact that he had a third choice came to him, as has been remarked, on a Thursday morning in spring. Caroline, who had been complaining of internal pains, had been taken to the hospital for tests and observation on the Wednesday, and on Thursday Hubert was telephoned by Dr. Edwards—an old family friend as well as the Todman medical adviser.

"I'm afraid," the doctor said, "that Mrs. Withers must be operated on immediately."

"What is it?" asked Hubert, hoping he sounded suitably worried, for his heart had given an upward leap.

He was quickly disillusioned. "Oh, nothing dangerous, now that we've discovered it in time," the doctor reassured him. "She has a large but happily not malignant growth on her womb. This is undoubtedly why she hasn't had any children. I would like to think it can be removed without a complete hysterectomy, but—"

"A complete what?" said Hubert, who knew little of medical matters.

"Removal of the womb and ovaries," explained Dr. Edwards. "Not a dangerous operation—but I'm very much afraid, old man, that you'll have to face the fact that Caroline will never be able to have a baby."

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This suited Hubert fine, but he made appropriate noises of regret. It was then that Dr. Edwards produced his life-saving bombshell.

"I must impress upon you, Mr. Withers," he said, "that although relatively simple medically, this operation can have quite serious mental aftereffects on a woman. The surgeon, you see, is doing in half an hour what nature does gradually over a period of many years. The result is that some women suffer severe post-operative depression. I don't want to frighten you, but sometimes they may have delusions and even become slightly unbalanced for a while. So I want you to be especially kind and considerate to your wife when she comes home from the hospital."

"Of course," said Hubert.

"The best thing," the doctor went on, "is for the woman to get a pet of some sort—a surrogate child, if you like. She may well transfer to it the pent-up affection for the child she now knows she can never have."

"Caroline has a pet already," said Hubert. "A Siamese cat." He tried to keep the dislike out of his voice. He had always hated the creature, with its steady blue eyes and supercilious manner.

"And she's fond of it?" pursued Dr. Edwards.

"She dotes on it," said Hubert. "She's even found a Siamese name for it—Pakdee, which means the faithful cat."

"Then it's splendid," said the doctor. "The cat will probably be able to do more for her than either you or I can."

A plan was forming in Hubert's mind. He said, "I was just thinking—when she's strong enough, it might be a good thing for her to take a vacation."

"Excellent. Excellent."

"I won't be able to get away myself," said Hubert, "but Caroline has an old school-friend who is married and lives in England. Lady Annabel Fairley. Annabel has been begging her to go and visit."

"A most satisfactory scheme, if Caroline agrees," said the doctor. "I wouldn't have liked her to go to some hotel on her own, but a visit to a friend and a complete change of scene—yes, by all means."

So, in a couple of weeks, Caroline was back from the hospital and recovering rapidly. She appeared to suffer from none of the ill effects the doctor had predicted, but this didn't prevent Hubert's fertile imagination from inventing them.

Each time the doctor called—for even today doctors will pay house

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calls on people like Caroline—Hubert managed to have a word with him alone before he left.

"Our patient seems to be making excellent progress," the doctor would say.

"Well—yes and no, Doctor."

"How do you mean?"

"Of course you wouldn't notice it just visiting, but you did warn me, and I think you ought to know that the thing is becoming an obsession."

"Thing? What thing, Mr. Withers?"

"This business of the Siamese cat. She won't let him out of her sight." Indeed, Pakdee had been snuggled up with Caroline on the daybed where she was resting when the doctor arrived. Hubert went on, "She even has this crazy idea that somebody is out to harm the cat. I can't help feeling it's not healthy for somebody to be so wrapped up in a mere animal."

"I told you, Mr. Withers, it's quite natural." Dr. Edwards was reassuring. "It will pass."

A few days later, while Benson, the butler, was serving cocktails, Hubert suggested to Caroline that she might visit the Fairleys in England. Caroline was enthusiastic. Since her marriage and her involvement with the business, she had become much more self-reliant. "What a good idea, Hubert. I'll call her tomorrow. You'll come, too, won't you?"

"I wish I could, darling," said Hubert, "but I've had a word with Bentinck"—Bentinck was The Firm's managing director—"and he doesn't feel we should both be out of the country at the same time. Besides, I've never even met Annabel. You'll have much more fun on your own."

"Yes, perhaps I will," said Caroline cheerfully. "I wish I could take Dee-Dee, but one can't, with the silly British quarantine regulations. Still, you'll look after him for me, won't you, Hubert?"

Dee-Dee was Caroline's pet-name for Pakdee. It revolted Hubert almost as much as the cat's parlor trick, which he would perform for nobody but Caroline. Every time Caroline returned home after an outing, she would stand in the hallway and call "Dee-Dee!" in a particular tone of voice. Wherever the cat might be, he would come hurtling at the sound and with one leap would be in Caroline's arms, his dark-brown front legs embracing her and his face buried in the hollow of her neck. The whole thing made Hubert feel slightly sick.

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Now, however, all that he said was, "Of course I will, darling, you know that." Soon he was able to report to Dr. Edwards that Caroline seemed much better and had agreed to go and visit her friend in England.

It was on the morning of the doctor's final checkup visit, while Caroline was sitting on the sofa with Pakdee on her lap, that Hubert said, "So it's all fixed? You go to England on the twentieth?"

"That's right," said Caroline. "The agency has made me a first-class booking on the lunchtime flight."

In the same pleasant, even tone, Hubert said, "I may as well tell you now that as soon as you've gone I intend to get rid of that cat."

"It should be—" Caroline did a double-take. "You intend to *what?*"

"Get rid of Pakdee," said Hubert. "I shall have him destroyed. Make no mistake about that, my dear." He left the room.

Dr. Edwards found his patient in near-hysterical tears. As far as he could make out, her husband had threatened to have the cat destroyed as soon as she left for England. She absolutely refused to go. Nothing would make her. Hubert must have gone mad. When the doctor suggested that she might have misunderstood her husband, Caroline clasped the cat even more firmly to her heart and sobbed that the doctor was as bad as Hubert and probably in league with him. Dr. Edwards persuaded her to take a sedative and went in search of Hubert.

Hubert sighed deeply. "Oh, dear," he said. "So it's started all over again. How very distressing. I suppose it's the idea of going abroad that's upset her. She's seemed so much more rational lately."

Edwards cleared his throat. "I don't suppose, Mr. Withers, that you might inadvertently have made any remark that might have led her to think—"

"Of course not!" Hubert was suitably indignant. "Why, only the other day I assured her I would do everything to care for the cat while she was away. I believe Benson was there, serving drinks. He must have heard me. I'll ring for him now."

The doctor was deeply embarrassed. "My dear Mr. Withers, there's no need. Of course I believe what you say."

Hubert, however, was adamant. "No, no, I insist." His finger was already on the bell. "This is all so worrying in its implications that I think you should feel convinced about poor Caroline's delusions."

Benson appeared, and dutifully confirmed what Hubert had said.

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Of course, he added, in answer to the doctor's questions, the cat was Madam's, and Madam had a special affection for him. On the other hand, he had never known the Master to be other than most kind and considerate to the animal. When he saw him, that was. Madam and the cat spent most of their time together.

The cat was not allowed in the kitchen, but Madam always fed him herself in the butler's pantry. While Madam was away, he, Benson, would be happy to undertake this duty personally. Benson was an English butler of the old school, inherited with the house from Arnold Todman, and he had known and been fond of Caroline since her childhood. In listing Caroline's scant number of friends, Benson should have been included.

"Well," said Dr. Edwards when Benson had withdrawn, "this is, as you say, a sad setback. I feel it more important than ever that she should get away for a vacation. On the other hand, since she can't take the cat with her, we must somehow convince her that she simply imagined your threat. Shall we talk to her together?"

They talked to Caroline together, and they talked to her separately. Hubert protested over and over again that he would cherish Pakdee. Benson promised to hand-feed him and to let Caroline know at once by telephone if anything seemed to be the matter with him.

Finally, Caroline was convinced. In fact, she was more than convinced, she was frightened—for she now truly believed she had been suffering from delusions. It's always a little scary to feel that one may be going slightly mad.

Dr. Edwards, speaking privately to Hubert, said that he had high hopes that Caroline's vacation in England would put an end to any further symptoms, especially when she returned to find her cat in good health. However, he added, changing to a more somber vocal gear, if delusions still persisted on her return, it might be necessary for her to take a cure in a quiet nursing home for a few weeks.

Hubert saw Caroline off at Dulles Airport, making all the right gestures and saying all the right things. Just as the doors were closing on the mobile lounge which was to take London-bound passengers to their waiting jumbo jet, he said, softly and pleasantly, "I shall have Pakdee destroyed this evening. Goodbye, darling. Have a wonderful time."

Caroline cried all the way to London, despite—or perhaps because of—the excellent champagne with which the air hostess plied her,

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hoping to cheer her up. As soon as she arrived at Fairley Hall, which was after midnight by British time, she insisted on telephoning home and speaking to Benson. He assured her that Pakdee was hale and hearty and enjoying his supper—it was seven o'clock in the evening, Washington time.

"I'm delighted you had a smooth journey, Madam," said Benson. "I'll fetch the Master to speak to you right away."

"No. No, don't do that, Benson," said Caroline. "Don't tell him I called." She rang off.

Early next morning, Hubert said to Benson, "I've been looking up Pakdee's health card. He's due for his yearly shots very soon."

"Yes, sir," said Benson. "Madam was remarking the same thing only the other day."

"Well, no time like the present. Call the Animal Hospital, will you, and make an appointment for this morning? Then find me the cat basket and I'll take him along."

So a couple of hours later Hubert drove to the Animal Hospital with a surly, silent Pakdee glaring from his wicker basket on the passenger seat of the Jaguar. The cat was duly given his inoculations and the details entered on his health card. On the way home, however, Hubert took a side street, doubled back, and drove to an entirely different address. It was that of a veterinarian he'd never met but had picked from the Yellow Pages on account of the fact that he lived in an outlying suburb to the south of the city, in Virginia. His name was Michaelson, and Hubert—identifying himself as Mr. Robinson—had made an appointment with him from a public phone-booth before leaving Dulles Airport the previous day.

Dr. Michaelson was a tall, thin man with a long, slightly vague face and long-fingered, sensitive hands. Pakdee calmed down as soon as he got into the surgery and allowed himself to be lifted out of the basket.

"Well," said Michaelson admiringly, "you sure have a beautiful and valuable cat here, Mr. Robinson. He seems in fine fettle. Is anything wrong, or does he just need shots?"

"He needs more than shots," said Hubert. "He's to be destroyed."

"You can't mean that, Mr. Robinson."

"Oh, it's nothing to do with me," said Hubert crossly. "It's my wife. She bought him as a toy and now she's tired of him. He's got to go."

"And there's nothing the matter with him?"

"Not that I know of."

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The vet looked thoughtful. He said, "I never like to destroy a young, healthy animal. Especially such a fine specimen. Are you sure you wouldn't like me to find a good home for him?"

"I want to see that cat killed," said Hubert with unattractive firmness. "I'm paying you to do it. The cat is mine, and I can do as I like with him. Come on, get it over with."

"You're absolutely adamant, Mr. Robinson?"

"Absolutely. And I want to see it done."

Michaelson sighed. "Very well," he said. He went to a cupboard and began to prepare a syringe. "Do you want to take the body away with you?"

"Certainly not."

"Some people," said Michaelson, gently ironic, "care enough about their pets to bury them in their gardens. However, if you wish me to dispose of him—"

"Yes, I do. Do what you like—just get rid of him."

"Very well." Michaelson stroked Pakdee gently. "Come on then, old fellow. This won't hurt."

Hubert tried not to look as the needle went in, but somehow he couldn't keep his eyes off the cat. Pakdee turned his head with his last strength and gave Hubert such a look of concentrated hatred from his deep-blue eyes that Hubert took an instinctive step backward. Then Pakdee keeled over and lay still.

Hubert pulled himself together. Averting his eyes from the body, he said, "Well, that's that. Thank you. What do I owe you?"

Michaelson said, "Nothing, Mr. Robinson. I never make a charge for destroying animals—whether it's to put them out of their misery or whether they're in perfect health." The tone of his voice exactly matched Pakdee's dying stare.

Hubert picked up the basket and made his escape. As he passed through the waiting room, he felt acutely conscious of the empty basket he was carrying. The only occupant waiting to see the doctor was a severe-faced middle-aged lady who also held a cat basket, which was occupied by a nondescript tabby.

"I'm sorry to see you've had to leave your cat with the doctor," she remarked. "Is it something serious or is he just boarding?"

Hubert muttered something about just boarding and hurried out to the car. He didn't for the moment feel up to anything more than finding a bar and having a stiff drink. Everywhere he looked, he seemed to see Pakdee's eyes. It was unfortunate that in the course of his so-called research he had just been reading a book on the

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connection between cats and witchcraft. Perhaps Caroline was a witch and Pakdee had been her familiar spirit. He ordered another drink and told himself not to be a fool. After all, his plan was only half complete. Pakdee had gone forever, but there was the question of his successor.

After an hour or so, Hubert felt strong enough to resume his journey, with the empty cat basket as passenger. This time he drove around the Beltway and off into the northernmost Maryland suburbs to another address he'd found in the Yellow Pages. This was a private humane society, which he'd picked as being as far as possible distant from the Michaelson surgery. The society, which announced in its advertisement that it never destroyed a healthy animal, acted as a lost-and-found agency and a sort of adoption society for cats. Hubert had also telephoned them from Dulles, giving his name as Mr. Green. His wife, he said, had set her heart on having a seal-point Siamese cat, having just lost her elderly but much-loved one. Did they have any for adoption?

"We don't have any kittens at the moment." Hubert had been surprised to hear a masculine voice on the line. He had always supposed that these places were run by cranky old ladies.

"Oh, we don't want a kitten," said Hubert quickly. "We want an adult cat. About two years old."

"Ah, then I think we can help you. Adult animals are always more difficult to place. Seal-point Siamese, you said? Yes, we have no less than three."

"I'll be along after lunch tomorrow," Hubert said.

He lunched in a small Maryland restaurant where he knew he wouldn't be recognized, and then drove to the Society's address, which turned out to be a small suburban house with half an acre of garden.

The whole place seemed to Hubert to be swarming with cats of all ages, sizes, and colors—some in spacious wire runs, some roaming freely. A covey of them were gently shooed away by the benign elderly gentleman who opened the front door, introducing himself as Mr. O'Donnell.

"Ah, Mr. Green," he beamed. "So nice to see you. Please come in. I'll take you to the drawing room—that's the one place cats are not allowed." He ushered Hubert into a small, shabbily furnished room.

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"I daresay you find this a rather strange establishment, but it's very worthwhile work. Makes a contribution, you know."

Hubert felt sure that he, too, would be expected to make a contribution. He had the money with him.

Mr. O'Donnell was still talking. "A seal-point Siamese, I think you said. About two years old."

"That's right," said Hubert. "A neutered male."

"A neutered male? You didn't mention that. That cuts down the choice a little, but, yes, we do have two. I'll fetch them and you can choose."

Left alone, Hubert ran over his plan in his mind. It seemed to him a good one. All Siamese cats, in his view, looked very much alike—except perhaps to the eye of love. Certainly none of the domestic staff—not even Benson—knew Pakdee well enough to be able to identify him positively. Dr. Edwards had only seen the cat on a couple of fleeting occasions. Only Caroline would accept no substitutes—especially in view of the fact that the new cat would certainly not respond to her call with Pakdee's parlor-trick. He knew—because he'd been listening in—about Caroline's call to Benson the previous evening, and guessed that a similar call would be made daily. Benson would be uniformly reassuring. So when Caroline returned and claimed that the cat in the house was not her cat—well, Dr. Edwards would certainly prescribe the quiet nursing home, which would enable Hubert to get the Power of Attorney he needed. Even a couple of weeks would be long enough.

He was aroused from his reverie by the return of Mr. O'Donnell, carrying a cat under each arm.

"There we are," he said, putting the animals down on the floor. "Delightful creatures, both of them. Take your choice."

There was never any doubt. One of the cats was noticeably larger than Pakdee, and his points were a much lighter shade of brown. The other, however, was perfectly possible. True, his whole coat was paler than Pakdee's, fluffier and less sleek, and his eyes were not only lighter blue, but mild and amiable. However, he was just about the right size and Hubert felt sure he would fool everybody except Caroline.

"There's no charge for the cat, of course," Mr. O'Donnell assured him, "but any little donation you feel inclined to make—"

Hubert made his donation and popped the counterfeit Pakdee into the basket, where he sat purring, his gentle eyes half shut. In fact, by the time Hubert had reiterated to Mr. O'Donnell that they had

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owned a Siamese before and therefore did not require the leaflets on care and feeding the Society provided, the cat had curled up in Pakdee's basket and was sound asleep.

Benson met Hubert at the front door and took the basket from him. "I hope the little fellow is quite all right, sir," he said. "We were a mite worried when you didn't return for luncheon."

"Sorry about that, Benson," said Hubert. "Matter of business I had to attend to, which involved lunching out." He hesitated. "Pakdee seems a little lethargic," he added. "Probably the effect of the shots. But the doctor says he's in excellent health. Just give him a light meal tonight."

"As you say, sir."

Hubert had been right. Caroline telephoned again that evening and spoke to Benson. When she heard that Pakdee had been taken to the hospital for shots, she panicked again—to the consternation of her friend Annabel. Only after she had phoned her veterinarian at his home and learned from him that Mr. Withers had indeed brought Pakdee in that morning for his inoculations did Caroline calm down. Annabel had a word with her husband and together they decided to write to Hubert and tell him they were worried about Caroline's nerves and her apparent obsession about her cat.

The letter arrived the day before Caroline's return, and was even more than Hubert could have hoped for. He called Dr. Edwards at once—he had intended to do so, anyway, but this gave him a God-sent opportunity. He suggested that the doctor should arrange to be at the house to welcome Caroline home and see her reunion with her beloved cat. The doctor agreed.

During Caroline's absence, Hubert had barely set eyes on the Siamese, who had been entirely in Benson's care. He had taken pains, however, to inquire frequently about the cat's well being and had been assured by Benson that the little fellow was fine, eating well and quite his old self. Very satisfactory.

On the day Caroline was due back, Hubert entertained the doctor to lunch and left him to his post-prandial coffee as he went off to Dulles to meet his wife.

Caroline was looking remarkably well. She inquired at once about Pakdee and Hubert assured her that he was in good form. "He missed you, of course, darling," he said, "but Benson and I tried to make it up to him. He'll be thrilled to see you."

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On the drive back down the lovely George Washington Parkway, Caroline chattered happily about England and her friends. Hubert was silent. He was bracing himself, with a mixture of emotions, for the scene that would shortly follow. It was bound to be unpleasant, and he disliked unpleasantness. There would be hysterics, and he disliked hysterics. Nevertheless, his plan would work. It couldn't fail. And Dr. Edwards himself would be there to see it.

Benson heard the car in the drive and had the front door open before Caroline had reached the top step.

"Welcome home, Madam!"

"Oh, Benson, it's nice to be back." Caroline came into the big hallway as the doctor came out of the drawing room. "Why, Dr. Edwards, I didn't know you'd be here! How very kind of you! Yes, I feel splendid—I had a marvelous vacation!" She put down her handbag and as Hubert came in through the front door she called, "Dee-Dee! I'm home, Dee-Dee!"

The cat must have been waiting on the stairs, on the landing where there was a window overlooking the front door. He came down the last flight like a flying bomb and leapt into Caroline's arms, purring his delight. And, as Caroline caressed him, he looked at Hubert over her shoulder. The old hard-blue eyes now gleaming with triumph. The old sleek coat. Pakdee.

"My Dee-Dee," Caroline was murmuring, "my Pakdee! My faithful cat."

It was Hubert who spent the next few weeks in the quiet nursing home. Soon after his release from it, he and Caroline were divorced. When last heard of, Hubert was in California, looking for another heiress. He was somehow managing to live on the meager allowance Caroline's lawyers sent him every month. The allowance would have been much larger—for Caroline was a generous soul—had Hubert not, in his frenzy, declared that she was a witch and that he had seen Pakdee die with his own eyes.

Dr. Edwards tried to put in a good word for Hubert. "He was mentally deranged, Mrs. Withers. How could he possibly have seen the cat die when it was obviously alive and well? I think you must make allowances."

"He had the intention," said Caroline. "That is what matters."

Funnily enough, it was only a few days after Caroline's return

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that Dr. Michaelson visited the private humane society in Maryland, bringing with him half a dozen delightful kittens for adoption.

"By the way," he said, "I suppose you had no difficulty in finding a home for that beautiful Siamese?"

"Which one?" asked Mr. O'Donnell.

"Oh," said Mrs. O'Donnell, her severe face softening into a very sweet smile, "John means the one I picked up from his surgery. Some miserable man had brought him in to be destroyed because he said his wife was tired of him—the cat, I mean."

"I suppose I should have destroyed him," said John Michaelson, "but he was an absolute beauty, and in perfect health. I took no money and got Robinson's permission to dispose of the cat as I wished. By that time I'd given him a pre-operation anesthetic shot and the man went away convinced he was dead. I knew Grace was in the waiting room and could bring him back here right away."

"That's right," said Grace O'Donnell. "I gave him a bath and blow-dry—he emerged several shades lighter, I can tell you—and some eyedrops I thought he needed. Then I went out shopping and, believe it or not, by the time I came back Patrick had found a home for him with a—a Mr. Green, wasn't it, Patrick?"

"Yes, my dear. A nice guy, he seemed. Had had Siamese before. Wanted this one as a present for his wife, who'd just lost hers."

"Mr. Green seems to have a much nicer wife than Mr. Robinson," said Grace O'Donnell. "I'm sure the poor creature is in a very happy home now."

He is, Mrs. O'Donnell. He is.

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DEPARTMENT OF FIRST STORIES

"This is a very important thing you gonna do, pal," Loomis's man said as he parked. "And you ain't gonna mess up, are you?"

Another impressive first story by a student of Craig Kee Strete at the State University in San Jose, California . . .

THE DELIVERY

by ROBERT CALFEE

The job sounded simple enough. "It's easy," said Loomis's man. "There's a package in the car. We want you to drive it, then deliver the package when you get there. Just like a postman." He pushed the soiled map toward me.

I knew it wasn't that simple. The money he was offering made that clear. And I knew that the jobs Mr. Loomis had for guys like me couldn't be legal. I looked at the map. Not too far, I thought to myself. No border checks—not even a state line. I needed the money and said I'd take the job.

"You get paid when you finish," he told me. "And don't try anything foolish. Do the job right or it'll be worse for you. You don't want to disappoint Mr. Loomis. He can get very upset."

Loomis's man had me driven by one of his barrel-chested thugs to where the car waited. "This is a very important thing you gonna do, pal," he said as he parked. "And you ain't gonna mess up, are you?" He glared at me, and I understood that it would be very bad for my health to mess up. I shook my head.

He opened his door and got out. A guy was waiting for us there, leaning nonchalantly against the dark-grey sedan. "You the guy?" he said, jabbing a half smoked cigar at me when I stepped out.

"Yeah, I guess," I replied. He frowned at this, so I added quickly, "Mr. Loomis sent me." He showed me a grin made of uneven yellow teeth. I looked at the car, but it didn't look like anything special. Just another sedan.

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The thug with the barrel chest went over to a group of waiting men to chat. The guy with the cigar leaned at me closely. He didn't smell too good, but I didn't say anything. "You know what you gotta do?" he asked.

"I get in the car, I drive to the place on the map, I deliver the package, I come back." I grinned at his gaping face. He suddenly burst out laughing.

"Deliver the package!" he howled. "Oh, that's rich! Hah!" He went to the group of henchmen and said something I couldn't make out. I heard him say something like "C.O.D.," and they all began to laugh. Then he turned around. "The key's in the ignition!"

I opened the car door and looked into its dim interior. "Hey!" he called after me. "Make sure he signs for it!" I drove away with their laughter ringing in my ears.

The inside of the car smelled like old things. Old tobacco, old booze, maybe even old lovers getting it on in the back seat. I turned to look, but there wasn't anything there but trash. Loomis's man had said the package was in the trunk. I thought about what it might be. Drugs, probably. Better not to think about it.

The car was pretty noisy—the engine rattled, the brakes squealed. The radio was long gone, but two pitiful wires crawled out from the hole in the dash in search of it. I pulled the plastic skeleton off of the rearview mirror and threw it down on the passenger side.

Maybe it was a bunch of money. But Loomis wouldn't trust some guy off the street with a lot of dough—no way. Unless he was counting on me being afraid of crossing him. I had a quick vision of being gunned down by Loomis's goons in some muddy alley. Yeah, it *might* be money.

Suddenly some fool cut me off in the road. I leaned on the horn. "Stupid bastard! Why don't you watch where you're going?" I immediately regretted it. Why can't I ever see the cop car *before* I do something stupid? They always see me, though.

I cursed under my breath as the black-and-white pulled out behind me. I couldn't believe this was happening to me. If he pulled me over, I was going to jail—I didn't have a registration for the car. For half a second I thought about just taking off, but the rattling engine told me I wouldn't get far. I pulled over to the right lane—maybe he was after the guy that cut me off—maybe he wasn't after me. No such luck. The cop pulled to a stop right behind me.

I killed the engine. The cop opened his car door like a switchblade

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knife and stepped out. The sideview mirror only showed me my face reflected in his shades. I cleared my throat. "Something wrong, officer?"

Stupid. Stupid.

"Can I see your driver's license and registration?" Deadpan voice, all business, no games. I remembered hearing somewhere that they're trained to treat every guy they pull over as a potential mass-murderer. Wonderful.

"Here's my license," I said, making my voice sound as little like a mass-murderer's as I could. In his mirrored glasses I could see myself—dim, and very, very small.

"Remove it from your wallet, please." God, I couldn't even give him my license without blowing it. I took it out and handed it to him, trying to keep my hand from shaking.

"Mmhmm," he said, scribbling on his pad. "Registration?"

I don't get a single break. "Well, uh," I stammered, "maybe it's in the glove compartment." Then I remembered whose car I was driving and I prayed there wasn't a gun inside as I reached over and pressed the catch. My sigh of relief was nearly audible when I saw there was a distinct lack of lethal weaponry inside, just a pair of wire-cutters and an old flashlight on top of some maps. I began thumbing through the maps and papers.

"Well?"

"Um, a minute. I think—yes!" Thank God. "Here it is!" I held the tiny slip of paper up triumphantly.

The cop took it without expression. I almost laughed out loud—everything was going to be okay.

"Are you aware that this registration has expired?"

I was going to jail.

"Officer, I, uh, I've sent for an extension. It hasn't arrived yet." Weak. Lame. Why don't you just slap on some cuffs and drag me away?

"All right. I guess everything else is in order."

What?

"Try to drive a little more carefully."

I just gaped at him.

"Here," he said, handing me back my license and the hard-won registration. "Have a nice day."

"Right. Thank you." I rolled up the grimy window as the cop slid back into his patrol car and waited until his taillights were gone before I started up the sedan . . .

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You can bet I drove more careful after that. I mean, jeez, a guy can only be so stupid, right? And that cop coulda found out what was in the trunk. I'd bet Loomis would be real angry if the cops got his package. Again I got thinking about what was in the trunk. Not money—Loomis wouldn't rely on anyone being scared of anything in the face of greed. Probably not drugs, either, for the same reason. What, then? Naw, I decided, I didn't really want to know.

It sure was a lot of money just to deliver a package. I mean, Federal Express was way cheaper than what I was getting. And they didn't know what was in their packages, either. Unless they X-rayed everything. Maybe Loomis didn't want it X-rayed. Maybe he didn't want to risk anyone knowing what was in the package. I drove on, trying not to think what sort of thing a crime boss like Loomis would want to hide in a trunk.

By the time I reached the place marked on my roadmap, it was already dark. But not so dark that I didn't get a real bad feeling about the deal. I turned on the flashlight and looked at the map. There it was: an *X* on Forest and Sumner—right here.

Outside, there was a chain-link fence—beyond that, nothing. Absolutely nothing.

"Christ," I cursed, and scrambled out of the car. I stared at the blackness where the sidewalk ended. Gradually my eyes adjusted to the gloom and I realized what this place was. It was an excavation. A huge pit yawned before me, black and seemingly bottomless. Gigantic earth-moving machines lay dormant on the opposite side and huge towers loomed over the pit, standing guard.

Loomis's address hadn't even been built yet.

He must have known what he was doing, I thought, retracing my path along the map. I didn't have much hope, though—I'd been driving so carefully since the incident with the cop I knew I couldn't have made a mistake. Yeah, this was the place, all right.

So why did Loomis have me deliver a parcel to a construction site? Whatever was inside the parcel held the answer.

I stepped quietly to the back of the sedan and clicked on the flashlight. The grey surface of the trunk gleamed back like a closed mouth, but I was going to make it talk to me. I fumbled out the right key and slid it into the lock. Then I stopped. Did I really want to do this? I thought about Loomis's goons again. Then, sucking cool, dry air into my lungs, I turned the key.

The trunk opened slowly. I looked inside, shining the light on the mysteries within. There was a large misshaped object that filled the

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trunk, wrapped in heavy burlap and tied with thick rope. The smell of the burlap filled my nostrils, mixed with something else I couldn't place. It gave me a bad feeling, real bad. On top of the burlap was an envelope. I opened it and read the card. Chills ran down my spine. Printed in large blocky letters were two words: BURY HIM.

Then I placed the smell.

I stared down at the huddled mass in the trunk, cold sweat beading my forehead. They'd killed some poor bastard and stuck him with me! I couldn't get involved with this!

I could just walk away. I wanted to do just that, when a hurricane of bad ideas hit me. No way was Loomis going to let me not do this job. Loomis was way too tough to buck. He could kill me himself if he wanted, or he could do it legal. Legal wouldn't be much effort—he'd barely have to lift a finger to nail me. My prints were all over the car and that cop took down my license for sure. If I didn't get rid of this body I'd be in a perfect frame for murder—and I didn't even know who the hell the guy was.

The body was heavier than I thought it would be. I almost pulled something getting him out of the trunk. There was a folding shovel, like what the guys in the Army use, stashed underneath the body. "Thanks a lot," I said to no one in particular.

I wedged the handle under one of the ropes so I wouldn't have so much to carry, then I bent down to pick up the bundle, hissing through my teeth as I wrestled the thing over my back. The ropes dug into my spine and after only a few steps the burlap started me itching real bad.

When I reached the fence, I set down the flashlight and clipped through the fence with the wire-cutters from the glove box. "You think of everything, doncha, Loomis?" I said out loud. I carefully retrieved the flashlight and, with one hand parting the darkness and the other holding a corpse, I began my descent into the pit.

The sides were steep, but they were muddy enough for me to dig my feet into as I staggered down. I figured the hole to be about thirty feet deep, but when I thought I'd come that far I still hadn't got to the bottom.

The load on my shoulder kept unbalancing me and I had to stop several times to get it straight. The smell stung my nostrils and my stomach heaved.

I looked back up the way I'd come. The mud was sinking a couple of inches with every step I took—I was leaving a trail.

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Suddenly the mud under my right foot gave. Overbalanced, I flopped backward with the body and fell the rest of the way down the pit.

I wasn't hurt much when I hit the bottom, but all I could think about was this dead guy on top of me, his burlap mask pressed into my face. I shoved him away and rolled out from under him as fast as I could. I spat mud and stood up.

I wiped the clay from the flashlight and turned it upward. Well, at least I wouldn't have to worry about my tracks any more. I looked down at my package. There, next to the wall, covered in mud, it didn't look like anything that used to be alive. I pulled the shovel free of the burlap shroud, then set down the light so I could see where I would dig.

Deciding I'd bury him right next to the spot where he'd landed, at the corner of the wall, I unfolded the shovel and locked it open. The dirt was soft like clay, and the work went pretty quick. I managed a hole about six feet long and two feet deep before I stopped digging. I looked at the mound and said, "You shouldn't have messed with Loomis if you wanted anything better." Bending down, I caught hold of one of his ropes and pulled him into position before the hole.

I stood up in preparation of shoving him in. Then I heard a *click* that echoed across the pit and the lights came on, flooding the depression I was in with blinding white. I froze completely, waiting for someone to shout "You're under arrest!" through a megaphone. But nothing happened.

Slowly I turned my head, shielding my eyes from the blazing light that poured from the arc lamps mounted on the towers high above. I was absolutely exposed, the shovel and body shouting silent evidence to anyone above.

Still nothing.

Maybe they just come on, I thought. I wasn't going to waste any more time, I decided. If they're up there, they'll say something. If they aren't, then I'd better get done before anyone comes. I leaned down and shoved, rolling the burlap into the shallow pit I'd dug. Then something white flashed out of the dark fabric.

I looked at it. Chills ran down my spine.

It was Loomis.

I choked back a shout at the pale face that regarded me from the torn, filthy shroud. Black eyes in a white face. I felt locked into place, my last breath burning the back of my throat. Feeling more

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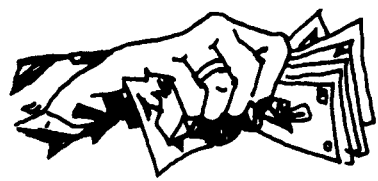
caught than before, with a force of will wrapped around a rod of fear, I yanked my gaze away, to the shovel. I lunged for it, and with a cry I stabbed at the earth above the dead man, sending it pouring down in chunks and clods on top of him.

I don't remember how I got out of the pit, or even driving away. I don't think I was even paying attention—all I could see was his eyes staring at me.

Loomis's goons laughed when they saw me. Barrel-chest gave me my money and I took it without a word. "We're proud of you," he chuckled, "and Mr. Loomis is *real* pleased that you did such a good job."



DETECTIVERSE

A MAN OF HIS WORD

by WILLIAM F. SMITH

Said a tough cop, "The suspects I seize
Must strip down to their BVDs
In the cold winter snow,
For I want all to know
When I tell 'em to freeze, I mean *freeze.*"

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"Don't be so smug." She swatted playfully at the air near his cheek.

His skin tingled at the almost-caress. "When you've got it, flaunt it."

A puzzled frown marred her creamy brow. "But who would believe that the victim would walk all the way to the Overlook to jump?"

Sandra Steelgrave is the pseudonym of a student majoring in English at Pace University, where she has been the recipient of the Sarah Willis Scholarship for Writing Excellence, an in-school short-story competition. She is a graduate of The American Academy of Dramatic Arts and has worked as an actress in bit parts in soap operas, Off Off Broadway shows, and music videos. She is interested in travel and is a raquetball and die-hard New York Yankees fan . . .

THE OVERLOOK

by SANDRA STEELGRAVE

"So you think this will really work?"

"Of course."

"Let's go over it one more time," she requested, a rapt expression on her pretty face. He couldn't help but be flattered by her obvious admiration.

"We start with an innocuous relationship." He leaned back in the dining-room chair, stretching his arms over his head, a superior expression crossing his even features. "The victim has to be someone the murderer has a casual relationship with—or more importantly, what is perceived as a casual relationship. Someone who had many such relationships. A generic type of individual, someone who has no outstandingly memorable characteristics that would make a

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chance witness remember him. Someone not close to his family. A man without a wife or steady girl friend would be best."

"Someone like you?" she teased, her lips parting to reveal even white teeth.

"Very funny." He made a comical face. "My current dating situation is not up for discussion."

"Sorry." She looked properly contrite.

"You're forgiven." His eyes lingered on her long red ponytail where it appeared from beneath his baseball cap, which he'd placed playfully on her head earlier.

"Go on," she prodded.

"The murderer has to be equally unmemorable. Though with a woman that would be easier—a temporary change of hairstyle, different wardrobe or makeup. In fact, it might be best if she *were* a memorable type—it would make the change all the more dramatic."

"Why?"

"How many times have you known a friend on the street from behind because you recognized her loud purple coat?" he orated. "You don't even bother to check her face, you know it's her."

"I see your point. Go on."

"The site of the murder should be somewhere deserted."

"Like the wharf?"

"No." He corrected her with a slightly condescending frown. "You're making a terrible mistake there. The road to the wharf is dirt."

"So?" she asked, baffled. "No noise."

He paused, speaking only when it became obvious that she wasn't going to figure out the problem for herself. "Tire tracks and footprints," he said on a sigh.

She didn't seem to notice his derision. "Go on," she said cheerily.

"The Overlook would be better," he continued after giving her a probing glance. Why did all the cute ones have to be so dumb, he thought.

"The Overlook—I never thought of that."

So incredibly dumb, he added silently. Out loud he said, "The Overlook adds one more possibility to the usual shooting, strangling, or stabbing."

"Suicide!"

"Correct, Watson." He folded his arms across his mediocre chest, acting the proud detective.

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"Don't be so smug." She swatted playfully at the air near his cheek.

His skin tingled at the almost-caress. "When you've got it, flaunt it."

A puzzled frown marred her creamy brow. "But who would believe that the victim would walk all the way to the Overlook to jump?"

"Why does he have to walk?" he challenged briskly.

The merest hint of a superior glint crossed her dark pupils before she lowered her all-concealing lids. "Well, the murderer can't use the vehicle they drove there in to make his getaway, so he'd have to hitchhike, and unless the driver who picked him up was conveniently leaving the country the next day, there'd be a witness."

"But this is a premeditated murder. The murderer would have ample time in advance to sequester an escape vehicle of some kind. There are plenty of trees and bushes around the Overlook where a small vehicle could be hidden. No one goes there in the winter, so it would be relatively safe. A moped, perhaps?"

"Brilliant," she beamed.

He patted himself on the back and they burst into comradely laughter. He tried to slip his arm around her, but she avoided the maneuver adroitly.

"So the murderer makes the crime look like a suicide," she said. "But what about a suicide note?"

He flexed his fingers, cracking the knuckles. "That's part of the challenge. The victim must be tricked into writing a note."

"And signing it." She paused. "What would one write in a suicide note?"

"Not the usual trite things. *I* would say something like—" Dramatic pause. "This is no one's fault but mine. I do not want to leave a legacy of guilt and accusation, but I can't go on with my dreary existence. I don't mean to hurt anyone, but, for me, there is no other option."

"I like that! Do you mind if I use it?"

"Be my guest." He brushed an absent speck off his dark-green sleeve.

"May I have your pen?" He dug it out and handed it to her. "How did that begin again?"

"'This is no one's fault but mine. I do not want to leave a—'"

"Slow down! 'This is no—' "

"One's fault but mine." He paused as she wrote slowly.

" 'One's fault—' "

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"But mine. Oh, give me that paper." He snatched the white pad from her, made a face at her illegible writing, and tore off the top sheet. His handwriting slashed across the page in a smudge of blue.

"Thanks." She sat back complacently.

"Any time." He finished the last sentence with a flourish, tore the paper from the pad, gave it to her, and waited.

"I don't think it needs a signature," she decided. "It looks believable as it is."

"How can you say that?" he growled. "Give me that." She did and he signed it. "Now, doesn't my name at the bottom make a difference?" Returning the paper to her, he grimaced at the blot of ink on the side of his hand. Absently, he rubbed it against his pantleg, where the blue ink became one with the worn denim.

She nodded. "Yes, I see your point."

He shook his head at her lack of brain power. "Thank you," he muttered.

She stared at the paper for a long time. "But how do we get the victim to write the note?"

"Well, one way could be to ask the victim to act in an amateur film you're making—maybe even tape him writing it and then erase the tape at a later date."

"Or save it as a souvenir, and maybe have the detective/hero find it."

"Too predictable. How about the killer inserts it as a scene in the victim's last film?"

"Too bizarre. This is only a creative-writing assignment, after all. Don't worry—I'll come up with something. Let's go on. We have to get the victim to the Overlook."

"Our murderer is a pretty young girl," he stated. "How do you think she lures our lovelorn victim there?"

"But they're friends," she protested, twining a red lock around one finger.

"This is fiction. You're in control. Give him a secret passion for her."

"Good idea." She smiled flirtatiously. Their eyes met and he reached one hand toward her. She moved backward, gasping as her coffee sloshed over the rim of the cup and onto her blouse. "Oh, no. I'll never get that out." Her hands brushed frantically at the stain. "I'm such a klutz."

"Here, let me help you with that." He hurried to the kitchen for paper towels, pouring water on them at the sink. You're making a

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great impression, he chided himself as he returned to the dining room.

She took the towels from him and rubbed at the spot.

"I'll get you a sweatshirt to change into," he said.

"Thanks." She rose. "I'll be in the bathroom soaking my blouse. Knock first," she warned.

"Here you go," he called through the heavy door.

"Thanks." The door opened partway and her naked arm reached from behind it.

He waited, conjuring the image of her slipping into his shirt.

"Right." She opened the door and stepped out, nearly cannoning into him. He stepped back. "Look at me in this. I look like a house. I could wear this as a dress it's so long."

"You look wonderful," he said honestly. She had tucked her bright hair up into the baseball cap, exposing her long slender neck. "Do you want any more coffee?" he asked as she brushed past him, returning to their notes.

"No," she smiled, tucking the sweatshirt beneath her as she sat. "Klutzy I may be, but I do learn. Anyway, we've got work to do." She picked up her notebook. "So we've got them at the Overlook, where she has a moped hidden for her escape. Then what?"

"What do you do at an Overlook?" he prompted.

"You look over," she answered facetiously.

"You look over." He sat opposite her. "And to get a good view of something your very pretty companion points out, you lean farther over the rail."

"She's going to have to be strong."

"Never underestimate the power of the maniacal mind. Remember, the beauty of this crime is that there's no motive—only the murderer's intention to take a life. Any life. She's certifiably insane. Coming so close to her desire, she'd find the strength." She looked thoughtful. "Or she might get some weights and work out in secret."

"I guess."

"You guess? This plot is sheer genius."

"I don't want genius, just a C." She tucked one foot underneath her and swung the other to a silent rhythm.

"This is an A if ever I saw one," he bragged, knowing that if it weren't for his brains she wouldn't have come to his house tonight. And his parents were out of town.

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"In that case, we should work it down to a B." Her foot began to swing faster. "If it's an A, Mr. O'Brien will call in my parents because he's suspicious or he'll throw a party. Either way, I'd rather not attract the attention."

"Right, Red," he countered. Then, made confident by the knowledge they were completely alone: "This is the first time I've seen you in muted colors."

"Very funny."

"No, I'm serious," he said in what he hoped was a suave manner—they were nearly done and he didn't want her to go. "You look nice in pastels."

"Can we get on with this?" she snapped, obviously irritated.

He flushed. "Anything you say."

"So she pushes him over and then she leaves the note on the front seat of his car?"

He placed his hand over his heart dramatically. "With the car door open forlornly."

"And she rides off into the sunset."

"Never to be caught," he added.

"The end." They both sighed loudly and fell back in their chairs.

She craned her neck to see the grandfather clock in the hall. "Goodness, look at the time. Have we really been here for seven hours?"

"Yes."

She rose and straightened her leather skirt, which was barely visible beneath the oversize sweatshirt. Padding softly into the bathroom, she retrieved her wet blouse and stuffed it haphazardly into her tote, then thrust her notebook on top.

"Would you like to join me for breakfast?" he ventured.

"Breakfast at four A.M.?" she laughed.

"Why not?" He stood his ground.

"What would we have?" she dared him, tilting her head back so that she could see him from beneath the peak of her cap.

"After this interesting conversation, I don't think plain old bacon and eggs will do." She was going to stay, his flustered mind told him. He took back all the harsh thoughts he had had about her snobbishness and stupidity over the years. She really was very nice.

"Yes. Let's do something different."

"Anything you want," he said gallantly.

"Do you have any doughnuts in the house?"

"Chocolate and custard-filled."

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"How about our taking them to the Overlook? If I'm going to set the murder there, I should take another look. I want to get my details correct."

"Sounds great to me," he agreed, a silly grin stretching from ear to ear.

"Oh, I forgot to ask you when I arrived—do you mind if I borrow your bicycle? My car's in the shop again."

"I'll toss it in the back of the van," he said. "First let me get the doughnuts."

ON OUR COVER

With *Dead Men Don't Ski,* published by Henry Holt and Company in 1959, Patricia Moyes introduced readers to Henry Tibbett and his wife Emmy. In October of this year, Holt published the eighteenth Inspector Tibbett mystery, *Black Girl, White Girl,* with an eleven-city author tour (Boston, Chicago, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, Minneapolis/St. Paul, New York, Philadelphia, Portland, San Francisco, and Seattle). The setting of the novel is the Caribbean, where "white girl" is island argot for cocaine.

Patricia Moyes began her writing career in London, with *Vogue,* then with Peter Ustinov. Her translation of Jean Anouilh's *Time Remembered* was produced in the West End in 1957 with Paul Scofield, Margaret Rutherford, and Mary Ure, and on Broadway in 1959 with Richard Burton, Helen Hayes, and Susan Strasburg. She and her husband presently reside in the British Virgin Islands. A great lover of cats (*After All, They're Only Cats,* 1973, and *How To Talk to Your Cat,* 1978), she is accompanied on the cover by Carol Brener's remarkable Clouseau—not Clouseau's first appearance on our cover. He and Carol, proprietor of New York's Murder Ink bookshop, graced the November 1986 cover of EQMM. Speaking of grace, this issue's cover photograph was taken by Peter Papadopolous in the apartment of your editor, who is here to tell you—with no disrespect, Carol—that if ever a cat was misnamed, it is Clouseau. After watching him negotiate some very crowded shelves without disturbing a thing, we'd say Amazing Grace would be much more fitting.

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a *NEW* short story by

ANTONIA FRASER

This year the two couples decided to experiment with a lesser island and go to Bexi on their shared vacation. An island paradise, said the brochure. Villa Aglaia was pretty near paradise, too. At first.

Antonia Fraser's The Warrior Queens *(Knopf), a Book-of-the-Month Club and Quality Paperback Book Club alternate, tells the stories of a long line of warrior queens, beginning with the British queen Boadicea, who in A.D. 60 led a massive but doomed rebellion against the Roman occupation, and ending with Golda Meir, Indira Gandhi, and Margaret Thatcher. "Its insights and enthusiasm make it beguiling," says* Publishers Weekly . . .

THE MOON WAS TO BLAME

by ANTONIA FRASER

Isabel said afterward that we were really getting too old for that sort of thing: which remains perhaps the best verdict on the whole sad affair. Unless you take the line—as my wife did—that the moon was to blame.

They've never found out who did it: just some ugly little incident among a lot of drunken campers. Since clearly none of us was involved, they let us all go and back we all came to England. Not immediately—that would have looked odd since we'd rented an expensive villa—but a little sooner than planned. You could hardly blame us for cutting short our holiday by a few days. A death on the beach below, police crawling all over the place, *Greek* police what's more: not that we put it like that to the charming young woman in the villa rental office, given that she was a Greek. In any case, she

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was most understanding. Especially as we showed no signs of asking for a reduction in the rent.

Obviously none of us four were involved—how could we be involved, up in that great big villa on the rock? How could a smart villa party of well-off married people from London be involved with some little scrubber camping down below? Different worlds. Utterly different worlds. Quite soon, the police took that line, too.

The world of the campers below was not only a different world, but a pretty horrible one to boot. Crowds—there must have been nearly fifty campers down there—and squalor, naturally, since there was no sanitation beyond the natural shade of the olive trees, those graceful trees whose leaves had flickered so exquisitely in the sunlight on the day we arrived, when the beach was still empty.

"Do you realize that apart from anything else—apart from the noise, ye Gods, the noise, we hardly slept a wink last night, did we, Isabel?—do you realize that it's *illegal?*" That was Nick. Isabel nodded vigorously, as she always agreed strongly with everything that Nick said in public. (In private, since the villa walls were not entirely soundproof, we were aware that matters were somewhat different.) But my wife, Dinah, did murmur to me afterward in that light voice of hers—the one she uses for her really snaky remarks—that it was wonderful to have Nick standing up for the law here on the tiny island of Bexi, it really must be the effect of the sun, since back on the great big island of Britain Nick sometimes took rather a different line about the law.

But I had better begin at the beginning. No, not at the very beginning, not from our very first business enterprise; suffice it to say that the four of us, Dinah and myself, Nick and Isabel, had become close enough over the years to take villas together in sunny foreign parts over a considerable span of time. The Algarve, Italy, Greece (Corfu followed by Paxos), all these have produced comfortable villas, more or less, and happy holidays, of which the same could probably be said. And frankly, a holiday which is more or less happy is way above most holidays you take: which is, I think, why we all persevered with the arrangement.

Did I mention that something else unites us—beyond the same line of work and living nowadays in the same part of London? We're all childless, or effectively childless. Nick did have a son by his first marriage, I believe, but either the mother kept him to herself or Isabel dumped him—the story varies. At all events, he never figures in our lives. As for ourselves, we've certainly never wanted children.

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We're enough for each other, always have been. I look after Dinah, she looks after me, as we're fond of saying, so that at the age when our contemporaries are spending all their time worrying over their ungrateful twenty-year-olds and a good deal of their money rescuing them from this, that, and the other, also without getting much thanks, we four have the luxury of our time to ourselves. And our money, too, come to think of it.

Douceur de vivre: that's our motto (and, yes, it does sound much better in French, but then we four are, I fancy, rather more enlightened in our enjoyment of luxury than the average couples who toast "the sweet life").

This year we decided to experiment with a lesser island and go to Bexi. An island paradise, said the brochure. And so I suppose it was—in a way. Much less spoilt than Corfu and much nearer to a decent airport than Paxos. Villa Aglaia was pretty near paradise, too. At first. Even my wife, who generally finds something to say about the washing arrangements or lack of them, approved the separate showers for each double bedroom, to say nothing of a water supply which actually did not run out. (Remembering that time outside Portofino!) And the view was so extraordinary, right there on the cliffs; we would look toward Albania at night and watch the moon rise. A thin crescent the night we arrived—amusing to be drinking retsina again, once the duty-free champagne ran out—but rapidly growing.

The moon: yes. Perhaps, after all, Dinah was right and the moon was to blame. Insofar as anyone else was to blame. Certainly the moon appears to have been to blame for what started to happen on the beach. When the first campers appeared—one large grey tent under the olives and one girl who slept under an old boat—we even thought them quite picturesque. The girl, anyway. "The local Samantha Fox," my wife dubbed her on one occasion, since she certainly had the most fantastic figure—the sort you could photograph for Page Three, as we couldn't help noticing since she seldom wore anything but a bikini bottom.

But Samantha Fox wasn't quite right since Brigitte—that was actually her name—happened to be brown all over, having an amazing tan apart from having an amazing figure. As a matter of fact, I chatted to her quite a bit in early mornings when no one else was around, and she was really very polite and friendly—just a kid working her way around Europe as a waitress, taking a holiday on this beach in between. German probably—or was she Swedish? She had

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this special feeling about St. Peter's, Rome, I remember, the square at St. Peter's; she was absolutely determined to see the square. We had quite long talks about it.

Not when the others were around, however. Then, I have to say, the conversation was on a very different level. Well, we were on holiday. There was one famous occasion when Brigitte, topless, wobbled so perilously near Nick, sunbathing on the stones, on her way to the sea that my wife and I both involuntarily looked toward Isabel.

The fact is that Isabel, who does sometimes bathe topless (but always discreetly up at the villa), does have the most lovely slim figure, everyone agrees about that. But if Isabel has a fault, it's the fact that, good-looking woman as she is, she is totally flat-chested. Perhaps that explains why I've never really fancied her, and perhaps that explains again why we've all holidayed so happily together. Be that as it may, on this occasion Isabel merely smiled in her most tranquil manner and murmured something like, "I should be so lucky." Later in their bedroom, however, it was rather a less tranquil story. What a tigress! That serene, smiling woman. Still, the end of it sounded rather satisfactory—at least from Nick's point of view, and I assume Isabel's as well.

All the time, the moon was getting stronger at night—I should say bigger, but was it the increasing strength of the moonlight rather than the size of the moon itself which was so unsettling? Could you believe moonlight could be so white? Even when the moon was only half full. That strange, cold, ancient light illuminating the sea which washed the rocks beneath us, the sea stretching out to the Albanian coast in a vast series of black-and-silver eddies with that broad flare path in their center.

We took to sitting later and later on the terrace with our wine—a light Greek wine, for after dinner. "So light, it's like drinking water," Nick had said jovially on our second night. But of course it wasn't quite like drinking water, particularly not in the quantities in which we consumed it. Perhaps it was all that wine late at night which made us so unsettled. They were odd, quirky, even slightly sinister, those sessions we had on the terrace. Yet hadn't we drunk wine in the Algarve and Italy and Paxos only the year before, the result being mere pleasure, relaxation?

Most unsettling of all, after we finally left the terrace, my wife and I had to lie, silent and sleepless, in our bedroom hot behind the shutters and listen to Isabel, the tigress of the night, who was growing more and more ferocious in the room alongside ours. Was *that*

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the wine? The wine coupled with the moonlight (I noticed they did not close their shutters)? Or was it the noises coming from the beach?

For the waxing moon brought campers, more and more campers. And given its provocative light, bathing the beach in its brightness like a too-well-lit stage where there had been nothing but discreet blackness before, we could hardly ignore their presence. There was—I can see it now, and my wife can see it, too—a feeling of working toward some kind of climax long before we heard the news about the party.

Besides, one or two fires began to flicker down below: those fires so dangerous to a wooded island depending on its olive groves, which was in fact the official reason for the banning of campers on Bexi. When we went down to swim in the early morning, we would find the black shells of night fires among the stones. There would also be cans of coke, beer, and bottles abandoned. And other even more distasteful signs of what had taken place on the beach the night before. Signs of "safe sex" perhaps, but as my wife observed, wrinkling her nose (I hastily removed one of these signs from her favorite path into the water, burying it under a big cairn of pebbles), "Safe sex is all very well, but what about a beautiful beach?"

Oddly enough, Brigitte very much kept to herself, apart from it all. She was friendly enough with the campers—she was a friendly girl, as I've said—but she never joined in with them at their various unpleasant goings-on. I know that, because I used to watch her sometimes from the lookout up above, watch her gazing out to sea, smoking the odd cigarette. What was she thinking about? St. Peter's square in Rome, perhaps, something like that. But I kept all that to myself, just as I never mentioned our morning conversations before the campers came.

At least the Villa Aglaia remained airy and remote from the squalor. In the daytime, when the campers were asleep or away in the little town of Bexi, so long as you didn't go down to the beach or visit the lookout you could cut yourself off from the squalor altogether. My wife cut branches of myrtle from the bushes which lined the steep but short path from the villa to the beach and put them everywhere in vases in the big rooms. But as the noise grew in proportion to the number of campers, I asked her not to cut back any more of the myrtle, for the bushes did at least conceal the path to the villa. What if the campers, drunk—or drugged, I put nothing past them—all decided to surge up the path in the small hours?

"Then you, darling, will have to be a big he-man and protect me,"

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Dinah said in her snaky voice. "I somehow don't think Nick and Isabel would notice."

It was Nick who brought back the news of the party which was going to be held on the beach on the night of the full moon. He had been into the little port in the Landrover just before dinner, while Isabel was washing her hair, to cash some traveler's checks. He came back looking white, or as near white as anyone as perfectly cared for and turned out (which means tanned) as Nick can ever look.

"A bloody great notice!" he exploded. "In English, what's more. Full Moon Party. On Aglaia Beach—our beach. Everyone invited. Bonfires, dancing, naked bathing. Come by boat! Come by moped! On the night of the full moon. All this on a notice fixed to a tree just outside the town." He repeated: "And in English, too."

"If it hadn't been in English, Nick," my wife pointed out reasonably enough, "you wouldn't have understood it." But Isabel, short, carefully streaked hair in a shining halo, was busy giving Nick a rewarding pat.

"Well done, Nick. At least you've warned us."

"Warned us! I damn well have. Look, I'm going to have a whiskey. Have we got any left? It's a disgrace. Tomorrow I'm going to tell that little Greek girl in the office that I want it stopped, stopped without question."

"But tomorrow will be too late, Nick," Dinah continued in that same reasonable voice. "Tonight is the night of the full moon. Didn't you notice last night? It was very, very nearly full—only one tiny sliver missing."

I must say that I was surprised at the time that my wife had that kind of information at her fingertips, but then I read in one of the magazines you only read in airplanes that retaining the capacity to surprise your spouse is the secret of a happy marriage. I daresay it's Dinah's remarkable sense of order which made her interested in something equally regulated like the phases of the moon.

So we come to the party. I have to admit a certain reluctance in thinking about it all, even now, back in London W.11 in our beautiful house, the house which some people laughingly suggest is too big for us—"too luxurious even for you two"—but is actually a wonderful monument to my wife's exquisite, cool, and above all fastidious taste. A showcase for a sense of order, somebody else said.

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If that's true about our house, and it probably is, then you can just imagine how poor Dinah suffered during that nightmare buildup to the Full Moon Party on Aglaia Beach. The utter chaos, the noise, of course—the noise was indescribable—and let me not leave out the fear. The four of us, four sophisticated people, crouching there—I'm afraid after a while we were definitely crouching—as the car lights came toward the beach along the edge of the cliff, an army advancing on us, and the full moonlight lit up what went on below. In a way it reminded me of some medieval picture of Hell—all the couples writhing as though in torment, their white limbs gyrating. In fact, they were of course dancing and copulating. You would feel like using that word if you had seen what we saw.

"Supposing they do decide to come up here?" Nick said that, I know he did. "Just supposing?" Nick is a big man, very heavily built in spite of all the exercise he takes. We're both of us big men, come to that, two big men with two fragile wives—that was another thing we had in common. Dinah, like Isabel, is wonderfully slender—well preserved or whatever you call it. Naturally she takes marvelous care of herself. But even Nick sounded frightened. And I was frightened, too.

It was some time after that that it happened.

"Supposing you went down there? Just supposing." Who said that? Who spoke those words? It must have been my wife, for who else was present when those words were spoken? Nick and Isabel had gone off to bed at last, their shutters open to the noises of the hot inflaming night, and the light of the coldly lustful moon. We could hear that the tigress was already devouring her huge submissive prey when those words were spoken.

The excitement comes back to me now, the secret, thrilling fear of it all, and the whispered words which went on: "Take her—you want her. She's down there. Find her and take her. You want her, don't you? Take her, you want her. Take her, you want her."

Take her, you want her, wanton and naked, wanton and naked, the words became like a rhythm beating in my brain. Wanton and naked: but no, these last words were never spoken, even by my wife, but they, too, became like a rhythm in my brain.

Those were the words which continued to turn and tumble in my mind as I went down alone, down the myrtle path to the Aglaia Beach.

It wasn't difficult to find her—Brigitte, the brown goddess of the

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beach. She wasn't even dancing with the others round the fire; she was sitting by the upturned boat, alone in the dark shadow cast by the boat. She was smoking one of her cigarettes and looking out to sea. Perhaps she was thinking about Rome and St. Peter's. I rather hope so. I really rather hope she was thinking about something nice. Even by the boat, the noise of all the others was incredible, confusing, and they had transistors now, belting out their dance music across the moonlit sea, desecrating the moonlight, desecrating the whole beach.

I took her quite easily. I grabbed her, grabbed that round brown wobbly body. She was quite little in my arms, in spite of her fullness—much smaller than I thought she would be. So I took her and held her tight. She couldn't shout, either—not that it would have mattered much if she had, the noise was so loud, the other people so busy round the bonfire. All the same, I put my hand across her mouth.

"Now show me you're a man, after all—a real man. Take her!" But she didn't say "take" this time—she used something far rougher, cruder. That was my wife's voice again, she must have followed me down the myrtle path, but it was a voice so avid, so ferocious, that for a moment it even might have been the tigress, Isabel. And besides, I'd never heard my wife use a word like that in all our married life.

And I did take her. Didn't I? I would have taken her. If only she'd cooperated just a little, practiced a little of that love and friendship she talked about to me on the beach.

Instead, she struggled—struggled rather a lot. I mean, why flaunt yourself like that, half naked, sometimes wholly naked, if you're not prepared to cooperate just a little?

As to what happened after that, there's really no point in recounting it all. Sad and rather squalid, really, but a complete accident. Even a misunderstanding, you could say. If it hadn't happened with me, it would have happened sooner or later with any of the other men she led on and didn't satisfy.

Afterward I hardly remembered the details of it all, isn't that odd? Just coming back so carefully and silently up the myrtle path, my wife's eyes gleaming like a cat's as we felt our way. Afterward holding her in bed, and my wife, usually so fastidious, holding me, too. Nick and Isabel were silent by then. That night, very late, it was my wife who was the tigress at the Villa Aglaia . . .

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There's not much more to tell. As I said, the police didn't really bother us much, just a great many questions and all that, naturally, but mostly the obvious questions about the party and the noise and then the tragedy—had we heard anything, seen anything, that sort of thing. It went on for hours.

Heard anything! Nick really snorted at that one, I can tell you. For a moment I thought he was going to start up all over again about the noise and the camping being illegal and why didn't the police stop it? Which under the circumstances wouldn't have been quite appropriate. But as a matter of fact, Nick's pretty good with the police, officials generally, knows the value of politeness and all that. He also cut quite an impressive figure, all washed and shaved and tidy.

We all were—washed and shaved and tidy. And the Villa looked immaculate. As anyplace with my cool, collected wife at the helm invariably does.

As to Nick being so good with the police and officials generally, my wife did murmur afterward: "Well, he's had a certain amount of practice, hasn't he?" But then, as I already mentioned, my wife has always been a little tart—one can't say more than that—about Nick's sharp business practices. As usual, there's a good deal to be said for her point of view.

The conversation with Nick and Isabel after the police left really rather proved her point.

First of all, Isabel said, yawning slightly: "Listen, folks, we've been thinking it over. We're really getting a little old for this sort of thing—holidays *à quatre,* I mean. It's been great, of course, no need to say that, but it's a hotel for us next year. Villas on the sea can be noisy. You can hear everything. That's a fact. The most peculiar things. The later at night, the more peculiar. So it's a luxury hotel *à deux* for us, in future."

She didn't seem to expect an answer to what she had just announced and I suppose there wasn't much we could say. She didn't look at either of us as she spoke, I do remember that.

Then Nick chimed in. He'd been thinking overnight as well, it seemed. And what Nick had been thinking about was the next big deal—the one where there'd been a bit of an argument, seeing as I had done all the work from start to finish and couldn't see that he should have more than a very small cut. Well, on this particular deal, he simply stated that the split would be fifty-fifty. With no argument. He didn't seem to expect an answer to that one, either . . .

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As a matter of fact, I don't miss our joint holidays with Nick and Isabel. She was right, we really had grown out of all that. It's that fifty percent which still rankles. But whenever I say so to my Dinah—I groan and ask, "Why did I agree?"—she replies in her snaky voice (which, generally speaking, she uses a great deal less nowadays):

"You lost your head in Bexi, that's why." Then she adds more softly, "It was the moon that was to blame." There's even a voluptuous note in her voice when she asks in her turn: "Wasn't it all worth it?"

DETECTIVERSE

INSIDER TRADING

by DENIS C. MUIR

An arbitrage broker named Fink
Discussed all his work with his shrink.
When the shrink made a pile,
They both went on trial
And now spend their days in the clink.

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Telly was a handsome child—about thirteen. Black, with the most incredible crystal-green eyes. One day he hung back at the end of class and approached Harold's desk. Said he had a question . . .

TELLY'S QUESTION

by JOSEPH E. WRIGHT

"Every once in a while, you get a student who's special," Harold began. "I don't mean necessarily genius. No, it's something you can't quite define or describe. There's an inner quality that tells you this child is unusual, that the world will one day be better because of him or her. Telly was such a child.

"He was in one of my classes last year. He studied hard, he came in prepared. He was bright and never caused any disciplinary problems. In short, he was the kind of student all teachers wish they had more of. Teaching would be a pleasure if you could have at least one class filled with nothing but Tellys."

At the head of the dining table was Franklin, the host. To Harold's right was Pru, who was puffing away on a cigar although her late doctor had told her forty years ago that she should give them up. Dinner had ended some time earlier, but the guests had taken turns telling a tale that involved him or her. It was now Harold's turn and the others listened attentively as he continued.

"Telly was a handsome child—about thirteen. Black, with the most incredible crystal-green eyes. One day he hung back at the end of class after the other students had filed out of the room and he approached my desk. Said he had a question.

" 'Is it all right to do something wrong if doing it means you'll be able to do something right?' he asked me.

"Telly and his classmates were at the age where sex was beginning to be important to them. At that age, it seems to be the only thing on their minds and the only subject of their questions. So here was a boy asking the age-old philosophical problem of ends justifying means. We chatted for a while and I tried to tell him that, no, we can't do something wrong to justify something we think is right.

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"The next day he didn't show up for school. I checked with the office and was told that no one answered his home phone. I asked for his address and told the secretary I'd look in on him on my way home.

"To get to Telly's neighborhood, you have to drive through one of the roughest parts of town, places you make sure your car is in good running order, you have plenty of gas in your tank, and all your doors are locked and the windows up. Telly didn't seem to me to fit into this place at all. His speech, his manners, his grades all said he belonged elsewhere and I began to wonder why he was living there, what kind of life he had had.

"I kept checking the few street signs still clinging to their poles for the address on the photocopy of Telly's school records on the seat next to me. It was getting dark, but I found the street, turned into it, and drove through three blocks of abandoned houses with windows missing, debris on the broken sidewalks, skeletons of old cars. I didn't have to be told that behind the walls of the houses were families of squatters and colonies of rats. Beyond some railroad tracks, I stopped where his address should have been and sat there for a minute, then opened the car door and got out.

"I looked around. If this was Telly's home, someone forgot to tell the housing authority. I was about to get back into the car when I heard someone tell me to stay where I was and not move. The voice had just enough conviction in it to suggest to my better judgment that I do what I was told. I did move my head, though, and I could see in what daylight was left the barrel end of a rifle.

" 'Okay, mister, what are you doing here?' the voice asked.

"I turned to face him—slowly, I assure you. 'I'm looking for someone,' I told him. 'One of my students. I'm a teacher and the address I have should be right about here.' I suggested I show him the school records and he permitted me to reach into the car and take them out. I handed them to him.

"He glanced at them and handed them back, evidently satisfied they looked official enough. 'You been lied to,' he said and lowered the gun. 'Ain't surprised none. These no-good punks a kids ain't worth bothering about, you ask me. They don't go to school. I spend half my time chasing them off a these here tracks. They comes here to smoke an' sniff an' screw 'round over behind that there shack. None a them kids is no good.' He emphasized his last comment by spitting tobacco juice to one side.

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"Since he was satisfied I wasn't there to smoke or sniff or screw around, he was amenable to my leaving. I left."

"The next day in school, I waited to see if Telly would show up. He didn't. I asked as many of the kids his age as I could what they knew about him and got precious little information. The consensus was that he kept pretty much to himself, although one boy said he saw Telly in a corner grocery store on two occasions, buying something to eat. No one seemed to know anything about his parents. The school records showed a telephone number, but no one answered it the couple of dozen times I called the next two days. I phoned at different times of the day and night, presuming that whatever parent or parents he had might be working odd hours. Finally, I called the telephone-company business office and was told that the number I'd been dialing was a pay phone. They gave me the location.

"I drove there. It was outside the grocery store Telly had been seen patronizing, three blocks from my encounter with the railroad watchman. The inside of the store was even less inviting than the outside. It smelled of dirt and worse. The produce thrown in the bins was rotting and there were flies swarming around it. A man in a stained undershirt, with several days' growth of beard and an unlit stub of a cigar at one corner of his mouth, asked me what I wanted. I told him I was looking for Telly. He said he didn't know him, that a lot of kids came into his store and they were all the same to him—thieves. He said he had all he could do to keep his eyes on their hands and didn't have no time to look at their faces.

"I went outside and got back into the car, deciding I'd wait there for a while. I slumped down in the seat, showing just enough of my face to keep an eye on the grocery store. A woman went in and left, a bunch of kids after that, then an old man with a dog. An hour went by and I told myself I was crazy. The likelihood of Telly arriving this evening was remote, at best. Why was I so interested in him, anyway? What did he mean to me? I teach, between my classes and after-school work, more than sixty pupils a day, so why spend my time looking for this one kid? One less really didn't make any difference. Logic—that ancient enemy of love—told me I was nuts. The time I was wasting looking for Telly I could put to better use helping other kids who needed me. A bit of old logic came back to me: something about it being better to let one man die than to have a whole nation suffer. That logic screamed at me to go home and get

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a good night's rest, because tomorrow I had dozens of kids dependent on my being alert.

"I left, but it had nothing to do with logic. Fear, cowardice, and wisdom convinced me I should head home when a rough-looking gang of teenagers began assembling around the car. They looked mean and I knew they'd have no trouble flipping it over with me inside should the idea enter their heads. A couple of them had chains and some had clubs. I turned on the motor and got out of there.

"The following day, Telly was still absent, so once more I went to the office and asked what, if anything, was being done about finding him. I was told his case was being investigated. 'Case?' I demanded. Poor skinny Miss Tuttle almost jumped out of the sweater she was wearing although it was one of the hottest days of the year. She pulled her wire-rimmed glasses over her ears and looked at me with frightened eyes. 'He's not a *case,*' I said. 'He's a child who could be in trouble. Sick. Lost. Who knows what may have happened to him!' But all I could get from her was that the absence was under investigation.

"Last class that afternoon ended at three-fifteen. Five minutes before the bell, I told the students I was concerned about Telly and asked them, if they knew anything at all about him, to see me after class. I painted a picture of some of the unpleasant things that can happen to kids these days, but when the bell rang every last student filed out.

"Not one of them came back with any information on Telly. I sank down at my desk, feeling totally helpless. I don't know how long I sat there before I looked up and saw Theresa standing just inside the doorway. Theresa was one of my students. I asked her if she wanted something.

" 'It's about Telly,' she said.

"Theresa had one of those voices you had to strain to hear. I got up and went to her.

" 'I know where he lives,' she said. 'He lives in an alley behind my house.'

" 'In the alley?'

She nodded. Telly, she told me, had been living in a makeshift lodging consisting of a wooden crate propped against the wall of an abandoned house, under the remnants of an old iron fire escape. She gave me directions to find the place.

"I ran outside and drove off, determined now to find Telly. Had he been my own son, I couldn't have been more anxious . . ."

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"I had no trouble finding the house Theresa told me about. There was a narrow alley separating it from its neighbor. I picked my way down the alley, stepping over broken bottles, a mattress, mashed boxes, filthy bags. Under the old fire escape Theresa had described was the wooden box, about six feet square. I looked in and saw some dirty carpeting, a filthy pillow from a sofa, and a blanket. I looked up at the backs of the houses facing me. On the second floor of one of the houses a ragged curtain moved ever so slightly. Someone was watching me. I didn't mind. I was hoping I might find someone who might tell me if they'd seen Telly that day, or knew his habits and when he was likely to return to his makeshift home. A grey tiger cat was studying me from a piece of fence.

"It occurred to me that there might be something in Telly's nest that might help. I squatted and looked in. I reached inside and moved the blanket. There was something there. Telly's schoolbooks. In the middle of this squalor, this child had his schoolbooks. What I felt then wasn't pity for this homeless child. It was guilt—guilt for all the times I had patted myself on the back for teaching these less fortunate kids. I wasn't the one who deserved to be congratulated. These kids did, the ones who were trying so hard, the ones who studied when there seemed no earthly reason why they should. I felt lower than one of the rats that lived in these back alleys.

"I was now determined not only to find Telly but to take him home to my place. He'd never spend another night in this box. I'd drive around all night if I had to until I found him. Just then I heard someone coming down the alley between the two houses. Great, I thought to myself, I have nothing to protect myself with. Then I saw I could relax—and rejoice. It was Telly!

"He came toward me, a smile on his face. " 'Mr. T., what are you doing here?' he said. Most of the kids call me Mr. T. It's easier for them and I don't mind.

" 'Looking for you,' I told him.

"He approached. There was something strange about him. He stumbled, losing his balance. I caught him. He let his weight fall against me and I found myself lowering him to the ground, kneeling with my right leg, the upper part of Telly's body resting against my left leg.

"He looked up at me, that smile on his face. His eyes were glazed and I suspected drugs of some sort, maybe alcohol. 'You shouldn't have come here,' he said.

" 'Wrong,' I told him in my most self-satisfied, here-I-am tone of

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voice. 'I'm going to take you away from here. You're coming home with me. You'll have a roof over your head and decent food.'

" 'No, it's too late,' he said.

"He was in some kind of pain. He closed his eyes and a red stream began to emerge from under his jacket. I moved the jacket and saw his shirt was rapidly turning crimson—blood was pouring out of a wound in his chest.

" 'What happened? Who did this?' I cried.

"He opened his eyes and looked at me. 'It's—a-right.' He was scarcely audible.

"I held him closer. 'I'm going for help,' I told him. 'I'll have to leave you here for a few minutes, but you'll be all right. I'll get an amb—'

"His left hand which had been holding the side of his jacket over the wound released its grip and fell to his side. I knew, without ever having witnessed a death in my life, that Telly had just died in my arms. I knelt there, paralyzed, not knowing what to do. Finally, I lowered him to the ground. I could hardly see him through the tears in my eyes. I stood and hurried out of the alley and looked about. There was no sign of a telephone. As I headed toward my car, I saw Theresa looking down at me from a window of a house. I motioned for her to open the window and called up to her to phone the police."

"As the evening progressed, so did my knowledge of Telly. The police filled me in. His parents had disappeared, leaving him to fend for himself. He was supporting himself the only way he knew in that neighborhood. He was a runner for one of the drug dealers, either the watchman at the railroad yard or the owner of the grocery store, the police weren't sure which. Both men were dealers known to the police, but small fry in the drug culture where Telly lived. The anger I felt was directed as much against the police as against the drug dealers. Why weren't those two men behind bars? I was so naive, I thought all that was necessary was for me to yell loud enough and every drug dealer in the city would be arrested before the night was over. I found out it doesn't work that way. The next day I discovered something else: life has to go on.

"I went to school and went to my classroom. Ordinarily, the room sounds like the storming of the Bastille—possibly louder—and it usually takes me some minutes to achieve something resembling silence. That morning I could hear my footsteps as I walked into the room. They must know about Telly, I told myself. I spent a few

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minutes telling them that I was with him when he died and that I hoped we would all remember him.

"I went on with my lessons, and as the hours went by I began to sense something unnatural in the room—a silence and coldness I'd never experienced before. When I called upon a child to answer a question, he or she spoke in a voice that was scary, as though they were not talking to *me*. When they looked toward the front of the room where I was standing, it was as if I wasn't there. In the lunchroom at noon I was given the same treatment. Something was terribly wrong. Midafternoon, in the corridor, I saw two boys from my first class that day coming toward me. When they saw me, they veered off. I lunged at them, grabbed them by their shirt sleeves, and held onto them.

" 'All right, what's happening?' I asked them. 'Out with it. What's going on?'

"They stared at me—not with the pseudo-blankness teens adopt when they're pretending they don't know what you're talking about. Their stare was totally different. It was full of hatred and contempt.

" 'Tell me!' I shouted.

"One of them spoke. 'You're pretending you don't know?'

" 'Know what?' I asked.

" 'That you killed Telly,' he said and pulled away from my grip.

" 'What the hell are you talking about?' I asked. 'I was Telly's friend!'

"The other boy removed himself from my grasp and shook his head. 'You *don't* understand, do you? And you're supposed to teach *us*. You killed Telly just as much as if you aimed that gun at him and pulled the trigger. If you hadn't gone around asking for him by name, showing people his school records, he'd be alive today. Man, don't you understand? You frightened the people he was working for, and when those people get frightened they eliminate anything and anyone who might connect them to the men higher up. If they don't, then the big boys get rid of *them*. Once you started poking around, the one Telly was working for had to get rid of Telly.'

"I stood staring at their backs as they went on down the hall to their next class. I still didn't fully understand what they'd told me. That came later. And it won't go away. It'll remain with me the rest of my life."

"You have my sympathy," Franklin said.

Harold nodded. "But I'm doing something about it," he said. "What

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I did to Telly I did through ignorance. I'm doing my best to make sure others don't do the same. At first I thought of giving up teaching and dedicating my life to fighting drugs on the street. Then I realized that there must be other teachers like me—who mean well, but don't know what to do about their students and drugs. Next school year, I'll be teaching teachers. I'll be making the rounds of all the schools in the state, explaining the things teachers should do, and especially the things they *shouldn't* do, when they suspect one of their students is involved with drugs. It's something I have to do, for Telly's sake."

The only sound in the room was the crackling of the wood in the fireplace. Pru blew her nose.

DETECTIVERSE

RISING DANDER

by DOROTHY BELLE POLLACK

Poor Isabelle knows, in all candor,
Her spouse loves to flirt and meander.
She's warned him enough,
But soon she'll get rough—
After strychnine, he'll cease to philander.

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a *NEW* short story by

PETER LOVESEY

The note read, IF YOU WANT HER BACK ALIVE GET ONE MILLION READY. INSTRUCTIONS FOLLOW.

"There's modern technology for you," Commander Jerry Glazier commented. "They do the old thing of cutting words from the newspapers, but now they dispense with paste. They use a photocopier."

You voted Peter Lovesey's "The Wasp" your second favorite story of all those published in EQMM in 1988. Here we have butterflies playing a startling role in a diabolical case of kidnaping, that of the wife of a devil-may-care captain of industry . . .

A CASE OF BUTTERFLIES

by PETER LOVESEY

Before calling the police, he had found a butterfly in the summerhouse. It had unsettled him. The wings had been purple, a rich, velvety purple. Soaring and swooping, it had intermittently come to rest on the wood floor. His assumption that it was trapped had proved to be false, because two of the windows had been wide open and it had made no move toward the open door. He knew what it was—a Purple Emperor—for there was one made of paper mounted in a perspex case in his wife Ann's study. As a staunch conservationist, Ann wouldn't have wanted to possess a real specimen. She had told him often enough that she preferred to see them flying free. She had always insisted that Purple Emperors were in the oak wood that surrounded the house. He had never spotted one until this morning, and it seemed like a sign from her.

"You did the right thing, sir."

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"The right thing?"

"Calling us in as soon as you knew about this. It takes courage."

"I don't want your approval, Commander. I want my wife back."

"We all want that, sir."

Sir Milroy Shenton made it plain that he didn't care for the remark, mildly as it was put. He rotated his chair to turn his back on the two police officers and face the view along King's Reach where the City skyline rises above Waterloo Bridge. He stared at it superficially. The image of the butterfly refused to leave his mind, just as it had lingered in the summerhouse.

Less than an hour ago, he had called the emergency number from his house in Sussex. The police had suggested meeting in London in case the house was being observed, and he had nominated the Broad Wall Complex. He had the choice of dozens of company boardrooms across London and the Home Counties that belonged in his high-tech empire. The advantage of using Broad Wall was the proximity of the heliport.

He swung around again. "You'll have to bear with me, I'm short of sleep. It was a night flight from New York."

"Let's get down to basics, then. Did you bring the ransom note?"

Commander Jerry Glazier was primed for this. He headed the Special Branch team that was always on standby to deal with kidnaping incidents. International terrorism was so often involved in extortion that a decision had been taken to involve Special Branch from the beginning in major kidnap inquiries. Captains of industry like Shenton were obvious targets. They knew the dangers and often employed private bodyguards. Not Shenton: such precautions wouldn't square with his reputation in the City as a devil-may-care dealer in the stock market, known and feared for his dawn raids.

Glazier was assessing him with a professional eye, aware how vital in kidnap cases is the attitude and resolve of the mark.

First impressions suggested that this was a man in his forties trying to pass for twenty-five, with a hairstyle that would once have been called short-back-and-sides and was now trendy and expensive. A jacket of crumpled silk hung off his shoulders. The accent was Oxford turned cockney, a curious inversion Glazier had noted lately in the business world. Scarcely ten minutes ago, he had read in *Who's Who* that Shenton's background was a rectory in Norfolk, followed by Winchester and Magdalen. He had married twice. The second wife, the lady now abducted, was Ann, the only daughter of Dr. Hamilton Porter, deceased. Under *Recreations,* Shenton had en-

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tered "Exercising the wife." It must have seemed witty when he thought of it.

Now he took a package from his pocket. "Wrapped in a freezer bag, as your people suggested. My sweaty prints are all over it, of course. I didn't know it was going to be evidence until I'd read the bloody thing, did I?"

"It isn't just the prints." Glazier glanced at the wording on the note. It read, IF YOU WANT HER BACK ALIVE GET ONE MILLION READY. INSTRUCTIONS FOLLOW. "There's modern technology for you," he commented. "They do the old thing of cutting words from the newspapers, but now they dispense with paste. They use a photocopier." He turned it over to look at the envelope. "Indistinct postmark, wouldn't you know."

"The bastards could have sent it any time in the last six days, couldn't they?" said Shenton. "For all I know, they may have tried to phone me. She could be dead."

Glazier wasn't there to speculate. "So you flew in from New York this morning, returned to your house, and found this on the mat?"

"And my wife missing."

"You've been away from the house for how long, sir?"

"I told you—six days. Ann had been away as well, but she should have been back by now."

"Then I daresay there was a stack of mail waiting."

"Is that relevant?"

The pattern of the interview was taking shape. Shenton was using every opportunity to assert his status as top dog.

"It may be," Glazier commented, "if you can remember what was above or below it in the stack." He wasn't to be intimidated.

"I just picked everything up, flipped through what was there, and extracted the interesting mail from the junk."

"*This* looked interesting?"

"It's got a stamp, hasn't it?"

"Fair enough. So you opened it, read the note, and phoned us. Did you call anyone else?"

"Cressie."

"Cressie?"

"Cressida Concannon, Ann's college friend. The two of them were touring."

"Touring where, sir?"

"The Ring of Kerry."

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"Ireland?" Glazier glanced toward his assistant, then back at Shenton. "That was taking a chance, wasn't it?"

"With hindsight, yes. I told Ann to use her maiden name over there."

"Which is?"

"Porter."

"So what have you learned from her friend?"

"Cressie's still over there, visiting her sister. She last saw Ann on Wednesday at the end of their holiday, going into Cork airport."

"Have you called the airline to see if she was on the flight?"

Shenton shook his head. "Tracing Cressie took the best part of half an hour. I flew straight up from Sussex after that."

"Flew?"

"Chopper."

"I see. Did your wife have a reservation?"

"Aer Lingus. The two-fifteen flight to Heathrow."

Glazier nodded to his assistant, who left the room to check. "This holiday in Ireland—when was it planned?"

"A month ago, when New York came up. She said she deserved a trip of her own."

"So she got in touch with her friend. I shall need to know more about Miss Concannon, sir. She's an old and trusted friend, I take it?"

"Cressie? She's twenty-four carat. We've known her for twelve years, easily."

"Well enough to know her political views?"

"Hold on." Shenton folded his arms in a challenging way. "Cressie isn't one of that lot."

"But does she guard her tongue?"

"She's far too smart to mouth off to the micks."

"They met at college, you say. What were they studying?"

"You think I'm going to say politics?" Shenton said as if he were scoring points at a board meeting. "It was bugs. Ann and Cressie's idea of a holiday is kneeling in cowpats, communing with dung-beetles."

"Entomology," said Glazier.

"Sorry, I was forgetting some of the fuzz can read without moving their lips."

"Do you carry a picture of your wife, sir?"

"For the press, do you mean? She's been kidnaped. She isn't a missing person."

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"For our use, Sir Milroy."

He felt for his wallet. "I daresay there's one I can let you have."

"If you're bothered about the media, sir, we intend to keep them off your back until this is resolved. The press office at the Yard will get their cooperation."

"You mean an embargo?" He started to remove a photo from his wallet and then pushed it back into its slot. Second thoughts, apparently.

Glazier had glimpsed enough of the print to make out a woman in a see-through blouse. She seemed to be dancing. "I mean a voluntary agreement to withhold the news until you've got your wife back. After that, of course—"

"If I get her back unharmed, I'll speak to anyone."

"Until that happens, you talk only to us, sir. These people, whoever they are, will contact you again. Do you have an answer-phone at your house?"

"Of course."

"Have you played it back?"

"Didn't have time." Shenton folded the wallet and returned it to his pocket. "I don't, after all, happen to have a suitable picture of Ann on me. I'll arrange to send you one."

"Listen to your messages as soon as you get back, sir, and let me know if there's anything."

"What do you do in these cases—tap my phone?"

"Is that what you'd recommend?"

"Commander Glazier, don't patronize me. I called you in. I have a right to know what to expect."

"You can expect us to do everything within our powers to find your wife, sir."

"You don't trust me, for God's sake?"

"I didn't say that. What matters is that you put your trust in us. Do you happen to have a card with your Sussex address?"

Shenton felt for the wallet again and opened it.

Glazier said at once, "Isn't that a picture of your wife, sir—the one you put back just now?"

"That wasn't suitable. I told you."

"If it's the way she's dressed that bothers you, that's no problem. I need the shot of her face, that's all. May I take it?"

Shenton shook his head.

"What's the problem?" asked Glazier.

"As it happens, that isn't Ann. It's her friend Cressida . . ."

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Between traffic signals along the Embankment, Glazier told his assistant, Inspector Tom Salt, about the photograph.

"You think he's cheating with his wife's best friend?"

"It's a fair bet."

"Does it have any bearing on the kidnap?"

"Too soon to tell. His reactions are strange. He seems more fussed about how we intend to conduct the case than what's happening to his wife."

"High-flyers like him operate on a different level from you and me, sir. Life is all about flow charts and decision-making."

"They're not all like that. Did you get anything from the airline?"

"Everything he told us checks. There was a first-class reservation in the name of Ann Porter. She wasn't aboard that Heathrow flight or any other."

The next morning, Glazier flew to Ireland for a meeting with senior officers in the *gardai*. Cork airport shimmered in the August heat.

At headquarters they were served iced lemonade in preference to coffee. A full-scale inquiry was authorized.

He visited Cressida Concannon at her sister's, an estate house on the northern outskirts of Cork, and they talked outside, seated on patio chairs. In a cream-colored linen suit and brown shirt buttoned to the top, she presented a picture distinctly different from the photo in Shenton's wallet. Her long brown hair was drawn back and secured with combs. Like Lady Ann, she was at least ten years younger than Shenton.

She had made an itinerary of the tour around the Ring of Kerry. She handed Glazier a sheaf of hotel receipts.

He flicked through them. "I notice you paid all of these yourself, Miss Concannon."

"Yes. Ann said she'd settle up with me later. She couldn't write checks because she was using her maiden name."

"Of course. Porter, isn't it? So the hotel staff addressed her as Mrs. Porter?"

"Yes."

"And was there any time in your trip when she was recognized as Lady Shenton?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"You remember nothing suspicious, nothing that might help us to find her?"

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"I've been over it many times in my mind, and I can't think of anything, I honestly can't."

"What was her frame of mind? Did she seem concerned at any stage of the tour?"

"Not once that I recall. She seemed to relish every moment. You can ask at any of the hotels. She was full of high spirits right up to the minute we parted."

"Which was?"

"Wednesday, about twelve-thirty. I drove her to the airport and put her down where the cars pull in. She went through the doors and that was the last I saw of her. Surely they won't harm her, will they?"

Glazier said as if he hadn't listened to the question, "Tell me about your relationship with Sir Milroy Shenton."

She drew herself up. "What do you mean?"

"You're a close friend—close enough to spend some time alone with him, I believe."

"They are both my friends. I've known them for years."

"But you do meet him, don't you?"

"I don't see what this has to do with it."

"I'll tell you," said Glazier. "I'm just surprised that she went on holiday with you and relished every moment, as you expressed it. She's an intelligent woman. He carries your picture fairly openly in his wallet. He doesn't carry one of Lady Ann. Her behavior strikes me as untypical, that's all."

She said coolly, "When you rescue her from the kidnapers, you'll be able to question her about it, won't you?"

Before leaving Ireland, Glazier had those hotels checked. Without exception the inquiries confirmed that the two women had stayed there on the dates in question. Moreover, they had given every appearance of getting on well together. One hotel waiter in Killarney recalled that they had laughed the evenings away together.

Within an hour of Glazier's return to London, there was a development. Sir Milroy Shenton called on the phone. His voice was strained. "I've heard from them. She's dead. They've killed her, the bastards, and I hold you responsible."

"Dead? You're sure?"

"*They're* sure."

"Tell me precisely how you heard about this."

"They just phoned me, didn't they? Irish accent."

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"A man?"

"Yes. Said they had to abort the operation because I got in touch with the filth. That's you. They said she's at the bottom of the Irish Sea. This is going to be on your conscience for the rest of your bloody life."

"I need to see you," said Glazier. "Where are you now?"

"Manchester."

"How do they know you're up there?"

"It was in the papers. One of my companies has a shareholders' meeting. Look, I can't tell you any more than I just did."

"You want the killers to get away with it, sir?"

"What?"

"I'll be at Midhurst. Your house."

"Why Midhurst?"

"Get there as soon as you can, Sir Milroy." Glazier put an end to the call and stabbed out Tom Salt's number. "Can you lay on a chopper, Tom?"

"What's this about?" Salt shouted over the engine noise after they were airborne.

"Shenton. His wife is dead."

"Why would they kill her? While she was alive she was worth a million."

"My thought exactly."

Salt wrestled with that remark as they followed the ribbon of the Thames southward, flying over Richmond and Kingston. "Don't you believe what Shenton told you?"

"She's dead. I believe that much."

"No kidnap?"

"No kidnap."

"We're talking old-fashioned murder, then."

"That's my reading of it."

There was a break in the conversation that brought them across the rest of Surrey before Salt shouted, "It's got to be Cressie Concannon, hasn't it?"

"Why?"

"She wasn't satisfied with her status as the mistress, so she snuffed her rival and sent the ransom note to cover up the crime."

Glazier shook his head. "Cressie is in Ireland."

"What's wrong with that? Lady Shenton was last seen in Ireland. We know she didn't make the flight home."

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"Cressie didn't send the ransom note. The postage stamp was British."

The pilot turned his head. "The place should be coming up any minute, sir. Those are the South Downs ahead."

Without much difficulty, they located Shenton's house, a stone-built Victorian mansion in a clearing in an oak wood. The helicopter wheeled around it once before touching down on the forecourt, churning up dust and gravel.

"We've got at least an hour before he gets here," Glazier said.

"Is there a pub?" asked Salt, and got a look from his superior that put him off drinking for a week.

Rather less than the estimated hour had passed when the clatter of a second helicopter disturbed the sylvan peace. Glazier crossed the drive to meet it.

"No more news, I suppose?" Sir Milroy Shenton asked as he climbed out. He spoke in a more reasonable tone than he'd used on the phone. He'd had time to compose himself.

"Not yet, sir."

"Found your way in?"

"No, we've been out here in the garden."

"Not much of a garden. Ann and I preferred to keep it uncultivated except for the lawns."

"She must have wanted to study the insect life in its natural habitat."

Shenton frowned slightly, as if he'd already forgotten about his wife's field of study. "Shall we go indoors?"

A fine curved staircase faced them as they entered. The hall was open to three floors. "Your wife had a study, I'm sure," said Glazier. "I'd like to see it, please."

"To your left—but there's nothing in there to help you," said Shenton.

"We'll see." Glazier entered the room and moved around the desk to the bookshelves. "While we were waiting for you I saw a couple of butterflies I'd never spotted before. I used to collect them when I was a kid, little horror, before they were protected. Did you know you had Purple Emperors here?"

Shenton twitched and swayed slightly. Then he put his hand to his face and said distractedly, "What?"

"Purple Emperors. There were two in the summerhouse just now. The windows were open, but they had no desire to leave. They settled

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on the floor in the joints between the boards." Glazier picked a book off the shelf and thumbed through the pages, finally turning them open for Shenton's inspection. "How about that? Isn't it superb? The color on those wings! I'd have sold my electric train-set for one of these in my collection." He continued to study the page.

"You must have lived in the wrong area," said Shenton, with an effort to sound reasonable.

"I wouldn't say that," said Glazier. "There were oaks in the park where I played. They live high up in the canopy of the wood. You never see them normally, but they are probably more common than most of us realized then."

"This isn't exactly helping to find my wife," said Shenton.

"You couldn't be more wrong," said Glazier. "How long ago did you kill her, Sir Milroy?"

Shenton tensed. He didn't respond.

"She's been dead a few weeks, hasn't she? —Long before your trip to New York. She didn't visit Ireland at all. That was some friend of Cressida Concannon's using the name of Ann Porter. A free trip around the Ring of Kerry—no wonder the woman was laughing. She must have thought the joke was on you, just as the expenses were. I don't suppose she knew that the real Lady Ann was dead."

"I don't have to listen to this slanderous rubbish," said Shenton. He'd recovered his voice, but he was ashen.

"You'd better. I'm going to charge you presently. Miss Concannon will also be charged as an accessory. The kidnaping was a fabrication. You wrote the ransom note yourself some time ago. You posted envelopes to this address until one arrived in the condition you required—with the indistinct date-stamp. Then all you had to do was slip the ransom note inside and hand it to me when you got back from New York and alerted us to your wife's so-called abduction. How long has she been dead—four or five weeks?"

Shenton said with contempt, "What am I supposed to have done with her?"

"Buried her—or tried to. You weren't the first murderer to discover that digging a grave isn't so easy if the ground is unhelpful. It's always a shallow grave in the newspaper reports, isn't it? But you didn't let that defeat you. You jacked up the summerhouse and wedged her under the floorboards—which I suppose was easier than digging six feet down. The butterflies led me to her."

Shenton latched onto this at once. Turning to Tom Salt he said, "Is he all right in the head?"

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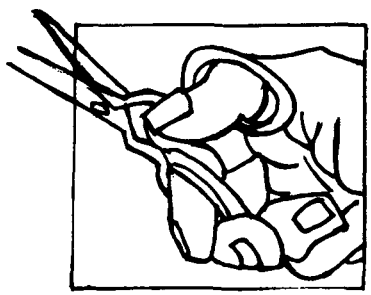
Salt gave his boss a troubled glance.

Shenton flapped his hand in derision. "Crazy."

"You don't believe me?" said Glazier. "Why else would a Purple Emperor come down from the trees? Listen to this." He started reading from the book. " *'They remain in the treetops feeding on sap and honeydew unless attracted to the ground by the juices of dung or decaying flesh. They seldom visit flowers.'* " He looked up, straight into Shenton's stricken eyes. "Not so crazy after all, is it?"



DETECTIVERSE

LIGHT'S OUT

by ROGER GALLAGHER

A writer whose mots were not bon
Kept trying to turn readers on,
But failures at mystery
Soon rendered him history,
And no one is sorry he's gone.

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a *NEW* Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Betty Willis still had the big front bedroom she'd shared with her husband for most of her lifetime. Now she lay in the ornate double bed, staring up at Dr. Sam as if she could see the angels coming for her.

"I'm dying," she told him.

The fortieth story in EQMM about New England country doctor Dr. Sam Hawthorne—stories narrated by him in his retirement—since the first one, "The Problem of the Country Bridge," in the December 1974 issue! Happy fifteenth anniversary, Dr. Sam, and thank you for services rendered well above and beyond the exigencies of the Hippocratic oath—part of which states that "into whatsoever house you shall enter, it shall be for the good of the sick to the utmost of your power . . ."

THE PROBLEM OF THE DYING PATIENT

by EDWARD D. HOCH

"Come in and have a seat," Dr. Sam Hawthorne said, reaching for the brandy. "The story I have to tell you this time is painful for me to recollect—it almost cost me my license to practice medicine . . ."

By the summer of '35 (Dr. Sam continued), I'd started cutting back on house calls. My office in a wing of Pilgrim Memorial Hospital was attracting more patients, and even though it was the depths of the Depression most families in town owned a car or had access to one. Generally, it was only the very young or the very old, especially

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those living on the outskirts of Northmont, who still needed me to come to their homes.

One of these was old Mrs. Willis, who was in her mid-eighties and suffered from a variety of disorders. I'd been treating her mainly for a heart condition and diabetes, but now she was bedridden after breaking her hip last year. I could see her strength going with each visit I made. She'd simply lost the will to live.

Her husband had died a few years earlier and they'd never had children. She was cared for now by a middle-aged niece and her husband to whom she'd promised the old farmhouse and its surrounding forty acres of untilled land. "It's all I've got to give them," she'd told me once after they'd moved in. "If they can put up with me, they deserve it."

I had to admit that Betty Willis, at the end of her life, was not a lovable person. She was domineering and hard to please. The niece, Freda Ann Parker, was a plain woman of forty or so who tried to take it all in stride. Her husband Nat wasn't nearly as easygoing. I'd heard him grumbling many times out of earshot of the old lady, and once he and Freda Ann had engaged in a heated argument in front of me.

About once a week I stopped by the Willis house unannounced if I had another call to make in that area. On one particular Monday morning, Freda Ann telephoned the office to make sure I'd be coming out. "She had a really bad night, Doctor. I think she's dying."

"I'll be there in about an hour," I promised. I finished up with the patient I was attending and told my nurse, Mary, that I'd be driving out to the Willis place.

It was a lovely June morning, the sort of day when summer seems to stretch out endlessly. I saw some boys running along the side of the dirt road, free at last from the confines of the classroom, and remembered the summer days of my own youth. I'd grown up in the city, but the sense of freedom had to be much the same. As I topped a rise in the road I could see the Willis farmhouse off in the distance, surrounded by a small apple orchard that was the closest to farming the Willises had gotten in recent years. It reminded me of childhood journeys to my grandfather's farm in Pennsylvania in those long-ago years before the Great War.

Nat Parker was in the orchard, inspecting the trees for possible damage from a windstorm the previous evening. He was a tired-looking man with thinning hair and a perpetual shadow of bristle around his chin. Nat seemed a good decade older than his wife, and

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probably was. "Did you have any damage?" I called out to him as I left my car.

"Nothing much, Doc. The way it was blowing, I feared it would take half the orchard with it."

"Your wife says Betty's not good this morning."

"Well, she could be better."

I left him and went in the front door. It was always unlocked and I knew Freda Ann would have heard my arrival. She came out of the kitchen to greet me. "I'm glad you could come," she said. "Aunt Betty's real bad, Doctor."

I followed her up the creaking stairs to the second floor. Betty Willis still had the big front bedroom she'd shared with her husband for most of her lifetime. Now she lay in the ornate double bed, staring up at me as if she could see the angels coming for her.

"I'm dying," she told me.

"Nonsense." I took her pulse and listened to her heart through my stethoscope. She was certainly weak, her vital signs lower than they'd been on my last visit, but I saw no imminent danger of death. I moved the glass of water with her dentures in it, the only thing on her night table, to make room for my bag. "You'll be fit again, Betty. All you need is some good strong medicine."

Freda Ann came into the room and stood by the door as I completed my examination. "How is she, Dr. Hawthorne?"

"Oh, I think a bit of heart stimulant should perk her up." I reached into my bag and unsnapped the compartment where I kept the digitalis. "Could you bring us a glass of water?"

She went back downstairs to the kitchen sink. The place still used an outhouse and there was no running water on the second floor. "Do I *have* to take a pill, Doctor?" old Mrs. Willis asked in a shaky voice. Swallowing was hard for her.

"Just a little digitalis, Betty. It'll get your heart pumping again." I took her temperature, though I was pretty sure she had no fever.

Freda Ann returned with the water just as I removed the thermometer. "Just about normal," I told them. "A bit low, in fact."

Betty took the pill herself and washed it down with a swallow of water. "I feel better already," she said, trying to smile.

I was just turning away from the bed when I heard her gasp. I looked back to see her lined face twisted with pain and surprise. Then her whole body sagged and she sank back into the pillows. "Betty!" I reached for her pulse.

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"What happened?" Freda Ann demanded. "What did you do to her?"

I couldn't believe she was accusing me of anything. "She's had some sort of seizure." There was no pulse, no heartbeat. I took a small mirror from my bag and held it to her nostrils. There was no clouding.

"She's dead, isn't she?"

"Yes," I told her.

"Was it that pill you gave her?"

"It couldn't have been. That was nothing but digitalis."

She stared at me with uncertain eyes. "It was so sudden. One minute she seemed fine—"

"You said yourself you thought she was dying," I replied, sounding more defensive than I'd meant to.

Freda Ann bit her lower lip, trying to decide what to do. At that moment her husband came up the stairs. "Aunt Betty's dead," she told him. "She went just like that."

He stared at the body, grim-faced. "It's for the best."

As I bent closer to close Betty's eyes, the unmistakable odor of bitter almonds hit my nostrils. I'd had experience with it in the past, on the night Prohibition ended back in '33. When I straightened up I said, "Something's wrong here. You'd better ring up Sheriff Lens on the phone."

Sheriff Lens had been my friend since I first arrived in Northmont to set up my practice thirteen years earlier. In many ways he was a typical country sheriff, and I'd been happy to lend a hand when he needed it. Now it seemed that I was the one who needed help.

He listened patiently to my account of Betty Willis's death and then asked, "Is there any chance you could have given her the wrong pill by mistake, Doc?"

"Not a chance in the world! I don't even carry cyanide compounds in my bag."

Sheriff Lens glanced around the bedroom, seeming to take in the faded, water-stained wallpaper, the family portraits, the bit of ivy struggling to grow on the windowsill. Then his eyes fastened on the half empty glass of water on the bedside table. "Is that the water she took it with?"

I nodded. "It should be tested, though I doubt if it's poisoned."

"How come?"

"No odor. I checked it right away." As I spoke, I took a small bottle

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from my bag—one used for urine samples—and poured the water into it. On a hunch, I also sampled the water her dentures were in.

"We'll have to do an autopsy," the sheriff said almost apologetically.

"Of course."

We went down to the sitting room where Freda Ann and Nat were waiting. "What did you find?" she asked.

"Nothing," I replied. "Is there something you think we should have found?"

Nat Parker seemed to be staring at the ceiling, perhaps studying a fluttering cobweb in one corner. Finally he said, "The old lady had a good long life. Her time was up."

His wife suddenly turned on him, close to tears. "I really believe you're glad she's gone, Nat! You couldn't stand having her in the house."

"Now, Freda—"

"It's true, you know it!"

He stood. "Maybe I should go out and check on the orchard."

Sheriff Lens cleared his throat. "We'll be taking your aunt in to Pilgrim Memorial for an autopsy, Mrs. Parker. You can go ahead and make the arrangements with the undertaker if you want to. He can probably pick her up there in the morning."

"Thank you, Sheriff."

He accompanied me to my car. As I was getting in, he asked, "What do you think, Doc?"

"There's a possibility one or both of them killed her," I told him, "but for the life of me I can't figure out how."

The following morning, Dr. Wolfe from the local Medical Society stopped by my office. Mary knew him and ushered him right in. "It's Dr. Wolfe to see you."

I laid down the medical journal I'd been reading and stood to greet him. "To what do I owe this honor, Doctor?"

Martin Wolfe was a tall man in his sixties with a mane of wavy white hair. He wasn't someone you addressed by his first name unless you were his senior in years and experience. "I've come about the tragic death of Betty Willis," he said.

"I've been waiting to hear the autopsy result," I told him.

"I have it right here," he said, handing over the official form. "Death was due to a sudden paralysis of her heart, respiratory sys-

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tem, and brain, caused by ingestion of hydrocyanic acid. A classic case of poisoning."

"I feared as much," I said. "But I can't see how it could have happened. I never left her for an instant. The digitalis preparation I gave her came from my own bag and the glass of water had no detectable odor."

"The water was pure," he confirmed. "It was tested. Tell me, Dr. Hawthorne, what type of digitalis preparation did you administer?"

"Digoxin. It came on the market just last year."

Wolfe pursed his lips. "I'm quite familiar with it. As you must know, it has a very narrow treatment range. The proper dose is sixty percent of a toxic dose. It was a dangerous choice of medication in someone of that age."

He was beginning to irritate me but I tried not to show it. I said, "I might remind you, Dr. Wolfe, that Mrs. Willis died of cyanide poisoning, not an overdose of digitalis."

"A point well taken," he admitted. "But if what you say is true, I can think of only two possible explanations. Either you made a terrible mistake when you gave Mrs. Willis her medication or—"

"Or what?"

"Or you took pity on this woman and decided to put her out of her misery."

"Mercy killing."

"That's what it's called," Dr. Wolfe agreed.

"I can assure you I did neither. I was neither stupid nor criminal in my treatment of her."

"Is there a third explanation, Dr. Hawthorne?"

"I intend to find one."

"Very well." He rose to his feet, towering over the desk. "The Medical Society holds its regular monthly meeting one week from today. This matter is certain to be brought up. I trust you'll have an explanation by that time."

I waited until he'd left the office, unable to move from the desk in my growing fury. When Mary came in, she found me holding the two ends of a pencil I'd just broken.

"What was that all about?" she asked.

"I think you should have taken that job in Springfield," I told her. "A week from now I may not have a practice in Northmont."

"What?"

"Apparently the Medical Society is going to look into Betty Willis's

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death next week. Wolfe thinks it was either a serious mistake or a mercy killing on my part."

"That's crazy, Sam!" I was too upset to realize until later that she'd used my first name. "Is he out to get you for some reason?"

"I don't know. We've never been especially friendly, but I'm not aware of any injury I've done him."

"Could Mrs. Willis have been poisoned by her niece or her husband?"

"I don't see how." I tried to think. "It had to be them, but I can't see how they did it."

Mary went to the file drawer, removed a folder, and read through it. "The records in Mrs. Willis's folder only seem to go back a year. What about before that?"

"Before—" Suddenly I remembered. I wondered how I could have forgotten it. "Before that she was Martin Wolfe's patient."

Mary raised her eyebrows.

"I'd known her only slightly. But shortly after Freda Ann and Nat came to live there, they decided she wasn't getting the finest treatment from Dr. Wolfe. Part of the problem was that he was president of the Medical Society and had so many civic duties it left him with almost no time for house calls. After she broke her hip and became bedridden, they called me and I agreed to take her on as a patient. But there was never any hard feeling over it with Dr. Wolfe."

"Still, it might explain his present attitude," she said. "There might be a lingering guilt at having abandoned her himself."

All that day, I thought about my relationship with the dead woman and everything that had happened in the farmhouse the previous morning. I'd solved dozens of bizarre puzzles in my time, but nothing had prepared me for this simple case of a woman poisoned under my very eyes. It dogged me as I saw to my other patients and made my hospital rounds.

Betty Willis's body was laid out at the Freedkin Funeral Parlor on Main Street, right on the town square. I called there on Wednesday, the second night of the wake, and then attended the funeral on Thursday morning. There were already people muttering about keeping the body only two days instead of the traditional three, accusing the Parkers of hurrying to get her into the ground.

As I studied Freda Ann and her husband across the grave that morning, as the minister intoned the traditional prayers for the dead, it was difficult for me to imagine either of them as a murderer, and I wondered why they would have felt murder was necessary.

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Aunt Betty was a dying woman and her condition had been worse that very morning. There was no need for anyone to kill her unless her will contained some obscure provision with a time limit.

Thinking of that, I spotted Seth Rogers at the edge of the circle of mourners. Seth was a well known local attorney, much liked among Northmont's older residents, and it was a good guess that he was attending the funeral because he'd acted as attorney for the deceased. When the crowd started to disperse, I caught up with him, and after a few words of formal greeting I asked him directly.

"Yes, I handled her legal matters," he told me. His eyes behind thick wire-rimmed glasses seemed large and fishlike. "Not that she ever had much work for me. A little tinkering with her will from time to time, that was about all."

"When did she tinker with it most recently?"

"Oh, it must have been a year ago—before she broke her hip. She came over to the office to sign it, I remember that."

"And you hadn't seen her since then?"

He smiled at me. "You cross-examine like a lawyer, Sam. As a matter of fact, I visited her just last Friday, three days before her death."

"Could I ask the nature of your visit? I'm not asking you to be specific, just—"

"She wanted some advice about selling off a portion of the property. But she didn't pursue it at all. I gathered it was merely a possibility for some future time."

We'd strolled down the knoll to his car, a flashy green Cadillac Sport Phaeton with sixteen cylinders and a white convertible top. Though in many ways I preferred my own red Mercedes, I had to admit a secret fondness for this massive beauty with its $5,000 price tag. "Did she seem well when you saw her?" I asked as he got behind the wheel of the car.

"As well as she'd been lately. Well enough to be sucking on hard candy all the time I was there."

I remembered. "It was her one weakness. She always kept a bag of it on her night table. I couldn't complain, though. She was a good patient and generally did everything I told her to."

Seth frowned at me and leaned out the car window. "Just between us, Sam, was she murdered?"

"I wish I knew, Seth," I told him. "I really do."

All that day I was aware of gazes in the street, of whispered words

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as my familiar car drove past the center of town. The news was getting around that my conduct in Betty Willis's final illness was under investigation—by the Medical Society if not by the police. Back at the office, Mary confirmed how bad things were becoming. "Three of your patients for this afternoon and tomorrow called to cancel their appointments."

"Did they give reasons?" I asked her.

"Well, Mrs. Mason wasn't feeling well—"

"I guess we know the real reason, don't we, Mary? The word's getting around that Betty Willis was poisoned."

Her expression was bleak. "Everyone at the hospital knows the autopsy results and the word was bound to spread. What are you going to do?"

"Think about it," I told her. "I have the advantage of knowing I'm innocent. There has to have been some other cause of death."

She sat down opposite me. "Let's go over it step by step, Sam. Is there any possibility someone could have substituted cyanide for the digitalis pills in your bag?"

"Not a chance. You know what they look like. The manufacturer's mark is on every one. It's not something a pharmacist could duplicate in his back room. Even if one of them had been poisoned, I shook it from a nearly full bottle of a hundred. I've examined the others and they're perfect. No one could have known who'd get the poisoned one, or when."

"How about the Parkers? Were they in the room with you and Mrs. Willis?"

"Nat didn't come upstairs until after she was dead. Freda Ann stood near the door during my examination. The only time she approached the bed was to hand me the glass of water."

"And you're certain Mrs. Willis was really dead?"

"She was really dead, Mary. There was no pulse, no breathing, no heartbeat. And she couldn't have been faking it somehow, because I never left the room until Sheriff Lens arrived."

"Then it has to be the water. The glass of water. It's the only way she could have been poisoned."

"Don't you think I thought of that? First of all, when most cyanide compounds are dissolved in water, they give off a distinctive odor. Second, the half empty glass was never out of my sight after she drank from it. Third, I took a sample of the water for testing and it was perfectly all right. So was the water her teeth were in."

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The next patient—one who hadn't canceled—arrived then and our ruminating came to an end.

I slept badly that night, expecting that what had happened so far was just the prelude to a growing storm.

On Friday morning, Mary told me there'd been two more cancellations. With some free hours ahead of me, I decided to drive out to the Willis place, my first visit since Monday's tragedy. It was a fine morning, sunny and warm, and Mary was already planning a Fourth of July picnic with some of the other nurses. It would be coming up the following Thursday, two days after the Medical Society met. I wondered if I'd have anything to celebrate.

At the Willis farm I found Nat Parker in the pumphouse, repairing a pipe that supplied well water to the living quarters. "Good to see you, Doc," he said, wiping the grease from his hands. "Thanks for *coming to the funeral yesterday.*"

"It was the least I could do. How's Freda Ann holding up?"

"Oh, it's a bit hard on her but I think we both know it was for the best. The old lady wasn't doing nobody any good wasting away up there in that bed. Whatever you done, I thank you for it."

"Whatever I—? Look here, Nat, I didn't do a thing to hasten her end. I certainly didn't poison her, if that's what you're getting at!"

"No, no, of course not. I just meant whatever sort of accident happened. We take no stock in this talk that's goin' around town. You were a good doctor to her. She always spoke highly of you. She told us once you done more for her than old Doc Wolfe ever did."

"Did he ever come around to see her after I took her on as a patient?"

"Heck, no. At least I never seen him out here."

I went up to the house and found Freda Ann washing out some things in the kitchen. "There's lots to be done," she said, brushing the dark hair back from her forehead. "I've been cleaning out her bedroom and closets, washing the curtains and bedding."

"Has Sheriff Lens been out to see you?"

"He came by again last evening, full of questions. He still thinks my aunt was poisoned."

"She was, Freda Ann. There's no doubt about it."

"I don't know how it could have happened with you sittin' there right by her bed!"

"I'm sure that's what the sheriff is trying to determine. Tell me

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something. Was it just you who took care of your aunt, or did your husband sometimes tend to her needs, too?"

"Are you kidding? Nat stayed as far away from her as he could. He wanted to put her in an old folks' home, but I figured she was leaving the place to us in return for taking care of her and we had to do something to earn it."

"Have you spoken to the attorney since her death?"

"Mr. Rogers? Yes, he telephoned to arrange a meeting in his office. Nat and I are going in on Monday morning."

"Any problems?"

"No, I just have to sign some papers. The property comes to me, along with a small bank account and some stock she owned."

"I wonder if I could see her bedroom again. I'm just trying to get clear in my own mind what happened."

"Certainly." She led the way upstairs to the second floor. "I want you to know that Nat and I both think this business of the Medical Society holding a hearing next week is ridiculous. We have every confidence in you."

"I appreciate that."

I stood for a moment in the doorway, studying the bare bed and the scant furnishings. Without curtains, the morning sun streamed in the window, bathing everything in a golden glow. I sat on the same cane-backed chair I'd sat in the previous Monday, thinking about all that had happened since then. "Was Seth Rogers here last week?" I asked Freda Ann.

She nodded. "On Friday. He stayed about a half hour."

"Were you in the room while they talked?"

"Heavens, no. She always kept her legal and financial affairs strictly to herself."

I walked to the window and looked out, shielding my eyes from the sun. I could see Nat out in the yard, carrying his tools from the pumphouse. Then I turned and looked at the bare bedside table. "Was she buried with her teeth in?"

"Of course." Freda Ann looked at me strangely. "What an odd question to ask."

The weekend dragged on. I had two patients Saturday morning, and when I'd seen them both I stayed in the office going over Betty Willis's records. Mary poked her head in once and asked if I'd be attending the Fourth of July picnic. "We've got about twenty people so far," she told me.

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"I don't know, Mary. Right now I don't think my heart would be in it."

She understood. "I'll ask you again later," she said.

The next time the office door opened it was Sheriff Lens. "I was hopin' I'd find you here, Doc."

"What's up, Sheriff?"

He came in and sat down. "I'm still workin' on the Willis case. Folks want some action, but I don't know what to do. Should I arrest the niece, Mrs. Parker?"

"Your only alternative is to arrest me, Sheriff."

"Don't talk foolish, Doc!"

"Martin Wolfe doesn't think it's so foolish."

"Don't worry about him. He's just a lot of talk."

"If the Medical Society believes him, they could take away my practice."

"They don't think you murdered her, Doc. They just think you might have made a mistake of some kind."

"For a doctor, it's pretty much the same thing. If I made a mistake, I murdered her."

Sheriff Lens took out a package of chewing tobacco and opened it as he spoke. "I been thinking about it and comin' up with all these crazy theories—the sort you'd think of."

"For instance?"

"Well, maybe Mrs. Parker or her husband poisoned the old lady's false teeth."

I had to smile at that one. But would the truth, if I ever discovered it, be any less bizarre? "Cyanide kills instantly, Sheriff—within seconds. She didn't have her teeth in her mouth all the time I was there. And if she'd been poisoned before I arrived, she'd have been dead already."

"What went into her mouth while you were there?"

"The digitalis pill and a little water." I remembered something else. "And my thermometer. I took her temperature."

"Could someone have gotten to it and poisoned it?"

"Not a chance. I don't even carry it in my bag. It's right here in a little case inside my coat, with my pen and pencil."

"Well—"

"Believe me, Sheriff, I've been all over the possibilities already. Betty Willis couldn't have been poisoned, but she was."

"What are you going to do, Doc?" Sheriff Lens asked.

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"I'll attend the hearing on Tuesday, of course. I'll abide by their verdict."

"If they say you can't practice here—"

"There are other places besides Northmont." I managed a weak grin. "Maybe I'll become a veterinarian. They might let me treat animals."

"Doc!"

"Go on, Sheriff. I'm only kidding."

"I have to appear at the hearing on Tuesday. I been tryin' to trace any local purchases of cyanide compounds, but that's tough to do. A lot of photographic chemicals, like reducing or toning agents, have cyanide bases. People have little darkrooms at home for developing pictures and they go out and buy the stuff over the counter."

"They can even buy the stuff if they *don't* have darkrooms," I pointed out. "And the cyanide can be easily extracted."

He still looked unhappy. "What should I tell them on Tuesday, Doc?"

"The truth," I reassured him. "It's the only thing you can do."

Only one of my patients showed up on Monday, and I noticed people had stopped whispering when they saw me in the street. They didn't need to any more—everyone knew I was suspect in Mrs. Willis's death.

"I'm going with you," Mary announced Tuesday morning as I prepared to leave for the hearing.

"Nonsense—someone has to take care of the office."

Her clear blue eyes sparkled. "I've already arranged for one of the girls to answer the phone. I'm going along, Sam."

At that moment I had too much on my mind to argue with her. I merely shook my head in resignation and started for the door. She followed along and slid into the seat of the Mercedes next to me.

The hearing was scheduled for 10:30, and we were there early. The Medical Society served a three-county area, renting office space in the new Northmont Bank Building. A conference room had been set aside for the hearing and when I entered I saw that Dr. Wolfe and two other physicians I barely knew were already seated at the end of a long table.

Wolfe gave me a half friendly smile. "Take a seat anywhere, Dr. Hawthorne. I believe you know Dr. Black and Dr. Tobias. They're representing the other counties in our group."

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We shook hands all around and I introduced Mary. "This is my nurse, Miss Best."

Wolfe cleared his throat. "A pleasure to see you again, Miss Best, but this isn't a public hearing. I'll have to ask you to wait outside."

Mary retreated with some reluctance and I faced the three of them alone. "What questions do you gentlemen have?" I asked.

"This is an informal hearing, not a trial," Wolfe told me. "First off, let me say we've all admired your dedication and high visibility in Northmont during the years you've been practicing here, Doctor. I'm certain no one believes for a moment that any deliberate act was involved in the poisoning of Mrs. Willis. We simply want to determine if her death was the result of some preventable error on the part of yourself or someone else."

"There was no error," I insisted. "I gave her digitalis, the drug I intended to give her. The autopsy found it in her stomach."

"We plan to call two others to speak to the circumstances of this tragedy—Freda Ann Parker and Sheriff Lens. Do you have any objection?"

"None whatever," I said.

We listened to Freda Ann tell her story, about phoning my office when her aunt's condition seemed so bad, about my arrival, and about fetching the glass of water for me. They asked very few questions. Then it was my turn. While Freda Ann took a seat against the wall, I told them what I knew of Betty Willis's condition on Monday morning a week ago, of my decision to treat her with digitalis, and of her sudden seizure and death.

"You knew immediately that she'd been poisoned?" Dr. Wolfe asked.

"Yes. The odor of bitter almonds was unmistakable. I witnessed a similar poisoning a few years ago."

"And you told Mrs. Parker to telephone Sheriff Lens?"

"That's correct."

Wolfe held a whispered conversation with the other two doctors and they decided to call the sheriff in for his story. He entered the room with seeming reluctance, glancing at me as he took his place at the table. His questioning was brief as he told of receiving the call and arriving at the house to find me still waiting in the bedroom with the dead woman.

When he'd finished, Dr. Wolfe said, "That'll be all for the moment, Sheriff. Dr. Hawthorne, could we review the evidence with you?"

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"Certainly."

Sheriff Lens took a seat against the wall near Freda Ann Parker as Wolfe turned to me with another attempt at a smile. "Let me quickly review the facts of the case, Dr. Hawthorne. Please correct me if I'm wrong. When you arrived at the house, you found Mrs. Willis confined to bed as she had been for the past year. Your diagnosis was that she needed a heart stimulant but otherwise was in no danger of death. You were alone with the patient during the examination, except that Mrs. Parker came to stand in the doorway. She brought a glass of water to wash down the pill you prescribed, and almost immediately Betty Willis expired, with an odor of bitter almonds pointing to the presence of a cyanide compound. Sheriff Lens was summoned and you remained with the body until his arrival. The unfinished glass of water was never out of your sight, and when it was later tested it was found to be free of any poison. Is that a fair summary of the events?"

"It is," I conceded.

The other doctors consulted again, then Wolfe said, "I think we have all the facts. There will be a ten-minute recess."

The three men remained at the table while the rest of us filed out.

Mary was waiting in the hall. "What happened?"

"They're considering the verdict," I told her.

"What do you think?"

I patted her arm. "It doesn't look too good."

Sheriff Lens joined us, nervously unfolding his package of chewing tobacco. "I don't see how they can do anything to you, Doc. They got no evidence. All they're saying is that they don't know how she died, so you musta been responsible."

I was annoyed at everyone just then, even the sheriff. "Where did you pick up this habit of chewing tobacco all of a sudden?"

He put it away, looking chagrined. "Well, Sam, I was just tryin' to relax."

Dr. Wolfe appeared at the door to motion me inside. The others remained in the hallway.

When I was seated at the table, he began to speak. "Dr. Hawthorne, as I stated at the beginning, this is not a trial but an inquiry. Nevertheless, we have found sufficient circumstantial evidence that the death of Betty Willis could only have been caused by the mistaken administration of—"

Chewing tobacco.

I was remembering Sheriff Lens and his chewing tobacco. It was

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like chewing tobacco, in a way. The flavor mattered more than anything else.

"Excuse me for interrupting, Dr. Wolfe," I said, "but I've just thought of something."

"Unless it has a bearing on Mrs. Willis's death—"

"It does."

"Proceed, then."

I leaned forward on the desk. "Betty Willis had one small vice. She always kept a bag of hard candy next to her bed. It was there as recently as the Friday before her death, when her lawyer, Seth Rogers, paid a visit, but it wasn't there on Monday when I came to see her. Only a glass of water with her false teeth was on the bedside table."

"If her teeth were out, she couldn't have eaten anything, anyway," Wolfe pointed out.

"She could have had a piece of hard candy. She could simply have sucked on it and let it dissolve in her mouth. And that's how she was poisoned. The cyanide was injected into the center of the hard candy. It was dissolving into her mouth all the time I examined her without my knowing it. When it dissolved enough to release the cyanide, she died."

"Do you have any proof of this theory?"

"The absence of the traditional bag of hard candy is proof enough for me. Freda Ann Parker *had* to remove it after Mrs. Willis took a piece of it because she'd probably poisoned it and couldn't risk my examining it."

"Why Freda Ann and not her husband?"

"She's the one who tended to Betty. She would have offered the candy, and only she could have removed the bag. Nat was rarely in the room, and his presence would have been suspicious. And it was Freda Ann who phoned and urged me to come out because the woman was dying. She wanted Betty to die in my presence, to remove any blame from herself. She didn't realize the odor of the poison would be immediately obvious to me."

"Why would she do such a thing if Mrs. Willis was dying, anyway?"

"That's just the point—she wasn't dying. Her condition had been fairly stable, and Seth Rogers found her as well as usual on Friday. His visit, on a minor matter, is what triggered the fatal events. Freda Ann must have feared her aunt was about to change her will. She knew it hadn't been done yet because there were no witnesses to sign any document, but she decided to tell me that Betty Willis

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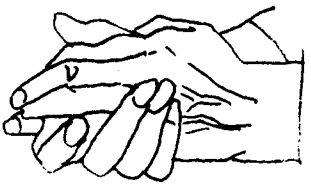
was dying, and then make the lie come true. Maybe Betty asked the lawyer out there to frighten her deliberately, never knowing it would lead to her murder."

Dr. Wolfe looked perplexed. "How will we ever prove this?"

"I suggest we begin by calling Sheriff Lens in to our meeting," I said. "It was him and his chewing tobacco that made me remember Betty Willis and her hard candy."

"The rest of it was easier than I could have hoped for," Dr. Sam Hawthorne concluded. "Freda Ann had given her husband the bag of hard candy to burn with the rubbish, but he was suspicious and held it out. He turned it over to Sheriff Lens and we found poison in four other pieces. Freda Ann received a long prison term—I don't recollect what ever happened to Nat.

"The good folks of Northmont more than made up to me for their suspicions during that terrible week. I went to Mary Best's picnic on the Fourth of July and it was a happy day without the hint of a crime. In fact, it wasn't until late that summer— But, no—I have to save something for next time."



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SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people. 18-80. Identity. Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

ORIENTAL ladies seeking correspondence, marriage. Presentations by American husband, Filipina wife. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948.

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS SEEK FRIENDSHIP AND MARRIAGE. American—Mexican—Philippine—European. Photo selection FREE! Latins, Box 1716-DD, Chula Vista, CA 92012.

BEAUTIFUL, ENGLISH SPEAKING, FILIPINAS want men of all ages as Life-partners. VIDEOS AVAILABLE. PAL, 51 BLANCA, CO 81123-0084.

NATIONWIDE Singles Magazine. Send Name, Address, Age. Send No Money. Exchange, 1817 Welton #1580, Denver, Colorado 80202.

SINGLE SMOKERS—MEET OTHERS! Nationwide Network. WRITE: INCURABLE ROMANTIX, P.O. Box 6919, New York, NY 10128.

SALESMEN-DISTRIBUTORS

AD SPECIALTY SALES OPENINGS. 80 Years in the Advertising Specialty and Calendar Industry have taught us the best Salespeople are Self-Starters who prefer the independence of straight commission sales over someone else calling the shots. NEWTON MFG. CO. offers that person the BEST Home Office Support in the industry! Ask around! Weekly Commissions, 24 Hour Toll-Free Message Center, a Generous Cash Bonus and the Top Sample Program in the Business. All orders Acknowledged. Shipping Notices provided and MUCH MORE! No Investment, No Collections. Full or Part-Time. You're your own Boss. Contact Kevin Peska, NEWTON MFG. CO., Dept. HIOC12, Newton, Iowa 50208.

SONGWRITERS

POEMS WANTED. Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

TAPES AND CASSETES

OLDTIME radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, PA 17349.

WIN $$$ WITH SKILL

WIN $$$ in skill contests. Win up to $5,000. TYC Company, 400 Wilson Drive, Midland, MI 48640.

For Greater Savings...Results...and Profits...

PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR SPECIAL COMBINATIONS:
Combo #1, Combo #2, or Combo #3.

Each combination is designed to give your ad the largest audience available.

Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.
For further information write to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

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ELLERY QUEEN

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING ORDER FORM

Send to **ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE**
Classified Advertising Department Suite 1401
380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

15 WORD MINIMUM
Only $48.00 for 15 Words or Less
$3.20 each additional word
Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER

DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the third preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

_____ Words at $3.20 each $ _____

_____ Capitalized word at 40¢ each _____
Total amount for 1 ad $

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total $_____ x 3 = $
(b) Multiply total amount on above line by x .85
(c) Total amount for 3 ads $

(Example: One 15 word ad $48.00 x 3 months = $144.00 x .85 = $122.40)

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME _____

FIRM (NAME IN AD) _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ **STATE** _____ **ZIP** _____

PHONE: _____ **DATE:** _____

YOUR SIGNATURE _____

$ _____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

(1) **$48.00**	(2) **$48.00**	(3) **$48.00**	(4) **$48.00**	(5) **$48.00**
(6) **$48.00**	(7) **$48.00**	(8) **$48.00**	(9) **$48.00**	(10) **$48.00**
(11) **$48.00**	(12) **$48.00**	(13) **$48.00**	(14) **$48.00**	(15) **$48.00**
(16) **$51.20**	(17) **$54.40**	(18) **$57.60**	(19) **$60.80**	(20) **$64.00**
(21) **$67.20**	(22) **$70.40**	(23) **$73.60**	(24) **$76.80**	(25) **$80.00**
(26) **$83.20**	(27) **$86.40**	(28) **$89.60**	(29) **$92.80**	(30) **$96.00**

HOW TO COUNT WORDS: Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word. Mark Holly 380 Lexington Avenue New York New York 10017 = 7 WORDS. Zip codes are not counted. Phone # = 2 Words. Symbols used as keys are charged for. City or State count as 1 word each. Garden City, New York = 2 words. Abbreviations such as C.O.D. F.O.B. P.O. U.S.A. 7x10, 35mm count as 1 word. (P.O. Box 145 count as 3 words) *Webster's International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling, compound words, hyphens, abbreviations, etc.* **Please make checks payable to ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE.**

NEXT ISSUE...

14 *NEW* stories—including

PETER LOVESEY (a youdunnit)

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Nick Velvet)

H. R. F. KEATING (Holmes-inspired detection)

JUNE THOMSON (about a dream garden)

TIM HEALD (about an obituarists' outing)

plus 3 Christmas reprints by

ROBERTSON DAVIES (about the great queen)

RICHARD SELZER (about Adele Cleary)

JOHN MORTIMER (about Horace Rumpole)

ELEANOR SULLIVAN ..... *Editor*
RUSSELL ATWOOD ..... *Associate Editor*
TERRI CZECZKO ..... *Art Director*
RON KULINER ..... *Associate Art Director*
CAROLE DIXON ..... *Production Director*
DENNIS JONES ..... *Newsstand Operations Manager*
ELIZABETH BEATTY ..... *Subscription Manager*
BRIAN McKEON ..... *Circulation Planning Director*
CYNTHIA MANSON .... *Director of Marketing & Subsidiary Rights*
CHRIS DORBANDT ... *Newsstand Marketing & Promotions Manager*
FLORENCE EICHIN ..... *Contracts Manager*
VEENA RAGHAVAN ..... *Promotions Manager*
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ELLERY QUEEN
Editor-in-Chief
(1941–1982)

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POSTMASTER: Send Change of Address to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 7052, Red Oak, IA 51591. In Canada return to 1801 South Cameron, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3E1. ISSN: 0013-6328. For back issues, send $3.50 to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 40, Vernon, NJ 07462.

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MAIL ★ ORDER ★ MALL

▼ CUTLERY: A CUT ABOVE THE REST

The secret behind Regent Scheffield's new Laser 2000's cutlery is the unique machined edge guaranteed to stay super sharp for 25 years — without sharpening! The result is a knife so sharp and durable that it comes with an unmatched guarantee: If a Laser 2000 knife ever dulls, chips, rusts, or breaks during the next 25 years, Regent Sheffield will replace it FREE! Plus, the Laser 2000's blades have a unique nonstick Xylan coating, so slicing even hard vegetables is a snap. And clean-up is a cinch because food doesn't stick to the blades. Unbreakable, dishwasher-safe handles are contoured to fit your hand comfortably. A lovely sleek wood block holds the entire 5 piece set: bread knife, carving knife, cook's knife, utility knife, and paring knife. **$129.98** ($7.00) #A1933.

▼ THE MAGICAL SPARE BED

It's almost like pulling an extra bed out of a hat. Unlike most spare beds that gobble up storage space and are unwieldy to move, this one rolls down to fit a 36"-long, 3"-diameter canvas case, to stash in a closet corner, car trunk, camper, anywhere. Yet it unrolls in minutes to a full-size 27" x 73" bed that will even accommodate 6-footers, supports up to 500 pounds and is comfortable to boot. The secret's in the inventive construction: a cotton canvas sling is supported on laminated steel legs with 6 steel springs for cushioning and stability on rough ground. Toss the carrying strap over your shoulder and go — camping, beach, poolside; the 10" legs keep it off damp ground and sand. Of course, this bed is indispensable at home, country home, dorm — even for kids in motel rooms. A superb value at **$61.98** ($12.25) #A1931.

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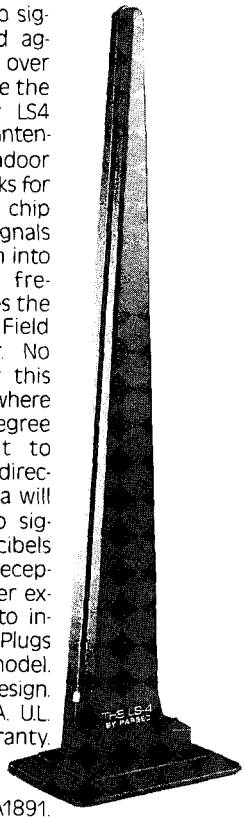
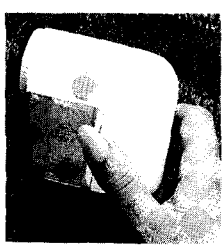
▼ THE BEST RECEPTION EVER!!

Eliminate radio signal fade and aggravating cross over signals that garble the sound. The new LS4 omni-directional antenna is the only indoor antenna that thinks for itself. The micro chip brain receives signals and isolates them into individual clear frequencies. Features the Gallium Arsenide Field Effect Transistor. No need to redirect this antenna. Leave it where it is and its 360 degree radius allows it to receive from any direction. This antenna will boost your radio signals up to 24 decibels for the clearest reception you have ever experienced. Easy to install, light weight. Plugs into any stereo model. Unique modern design. Made in the U.S.A. U.L. listed. 1 year warranty. Dimensions: 3" x4.125" x 17.25". **$58.98** ($5.25) #A1891.



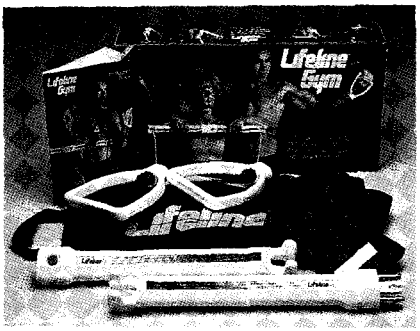
▼ LIFT THE LINT



Removes lint, fuzz & pills from clothing, fabrics, furniture. This powerful, delicate, fabric shaver restores used sweaters, skirts, etc. FABRIC SHAVER works wonders, on one "C" cell battery (not included). Convenient removable storage bin for easy cleaning. **$9.98** ($2.00) #A1794.

★ ★ ★ ★

▼ A PORTABLE GYM TOO GOOD TO BELIEVE



This portable lifeline gym is a 2 pound gym that can tone and shape all the muscle groups in your body in ¼th the time required by barbells. The secret is dynamic variable resistance supplied by it's indestructible design that instantly adjusts from three pds to 350 pds of resistance. Illustrated exercise booklet tells you how to move from one exercise to another. It comes with a 27" lifting bar, breaks down in the middle with stainless steel locking pins, jogging belt, 6½ cable, door attachment and foot stirrups, neatly packed in its own carrying case. In addition, it converts to become a unique treadmill, pulley system and variable resistance machine. **$48.98** ($5.00) #A1937.

HOW TO ORDER

CALL TOLL FREE, 24 HOURS A DAY, 7 DAYS A WEEK

1-800-365-8493

CUSTOMER SERVICE CALL 201-367-2900

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

30 Day Money Back Guarantee For Exchange or Refund

WE ACCEPT MASTERCARD/VISA

If ordering by mail send remittance to **MAIL ORDER MALL**, Dept.129 EL. PO. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701. Item price is followed by shipping and handling in ( ). Be sure to add both together to arrive at total price. N.J. residents add 6% sales tax. When using credit card — include account number, exp. date, signature. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign or C.O.D. orders.

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1905 Swarthmore Ave., Lakewood, N.J. 08701

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MAIL ★ ORDER ★ MAIL

▼ GOURMET POPCORN

Most electric and hot-air poppers "puff" the corn more than they "pop" it, leaving it tough with hard centers. This flat-bottomed stove-top popper reaches 475° and pops full in two minutes with 4 quarts of the best popcorn you ever tasted. Stirring paddle with through-the-handle crank virtually eliminates burnt or unpopped kernels. Wooden handle for safe grip, two dump lids. Pop without oil for delicious diet popcorn. 370 calories per 4 qt. bowl. Produce tender, fluffy, old fashioned movie theater popcorn, **$21.98** ($4.50) #A1876.

HOW TO ORDER

CALL TOLL FREE, 24 HOURS A DAY, 7 DAYS A WEEK

1-800-365-8493

CUSTOMER SERVICE CALL 201-367-2900

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

30 Day Money Back Guarantee For Exchange or Refund

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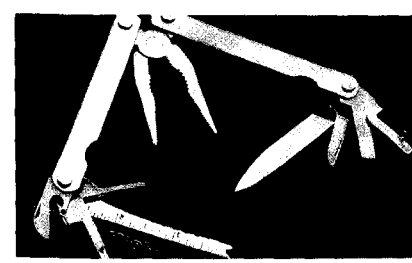
1905 Swarthmore Ave., Lakewood, N.J. 08701

▼ INNOVATIVE IONIZER

A sophisticated electronic device that uses nature's way of cleaning air — emitting trillions of negatively charged ions that act like magnets, attracting microscopic particles of dust, smoke and pollen. One belongs in every room, but sometimes a table-top ionizer just isn't practical or desirable for reasons of space or your decor. This tiny unit (1½"x3") provides an ingenious solution, plugging right into any wall outlet, where it will remain inconspicuous while performing its mighty task. With "on" indicator light and collector pad that can be rinsed and, eventually, replaced. By Polienex, for fresher air in home or office. **$39.98** ($4.00) #A1867.

▼ POCKET WORKSHOP

Hold an entire workshop in the palm of your hand or stash in pocket. Weighing in at 5 ounces and folding to just 4½" long, it opens to a full-size set of pilers (needle nose at tip, regular bolt grabbers in the middle and sharp wire cutter at the base). Plus 2½" knife; 4 screwdrivers, (jeweler's, medium, large and Phillips); awl/punch; file, can opener; fish scaler and ruler. Stainless steel; **$25.98** ($3.00) #A1712.



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